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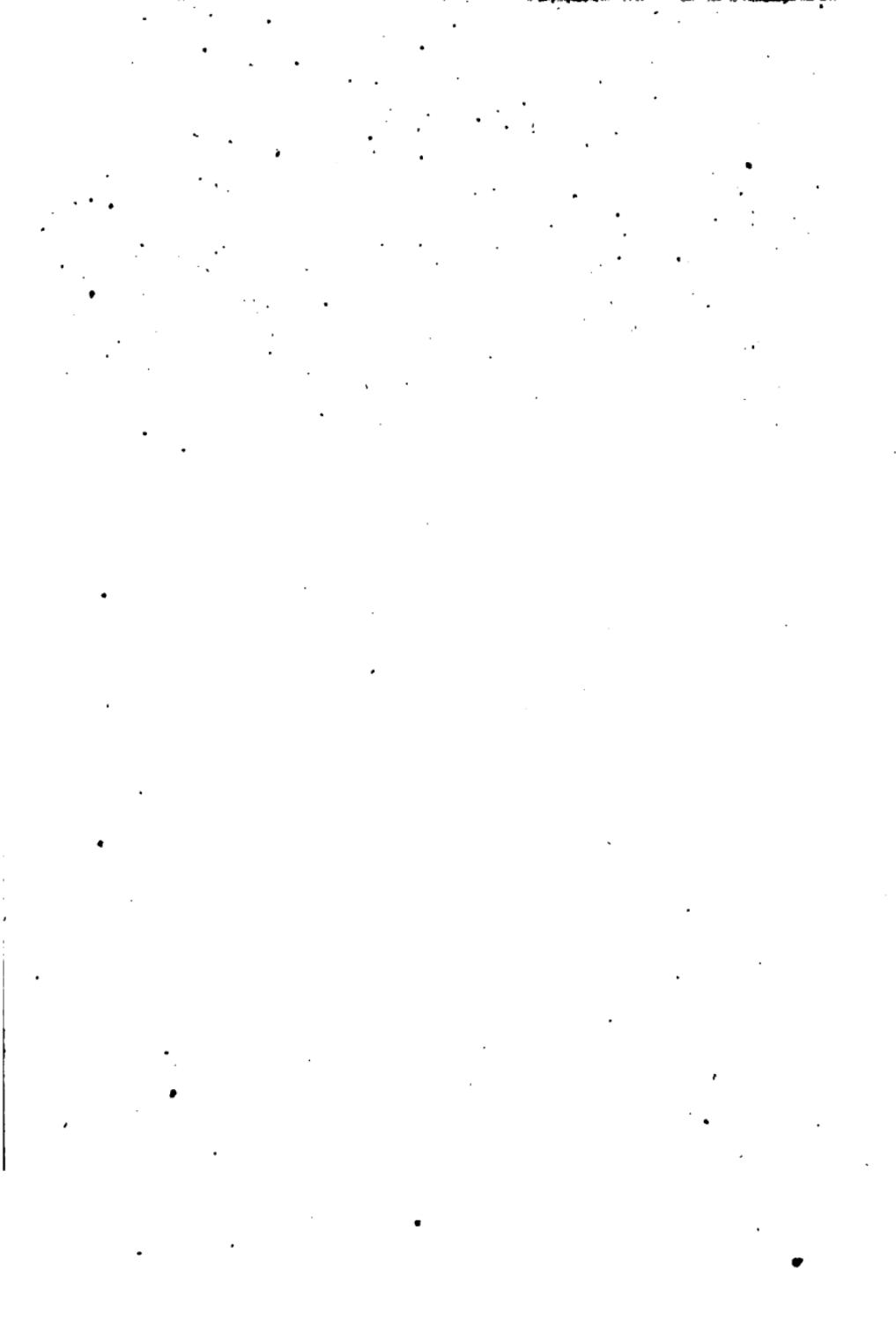
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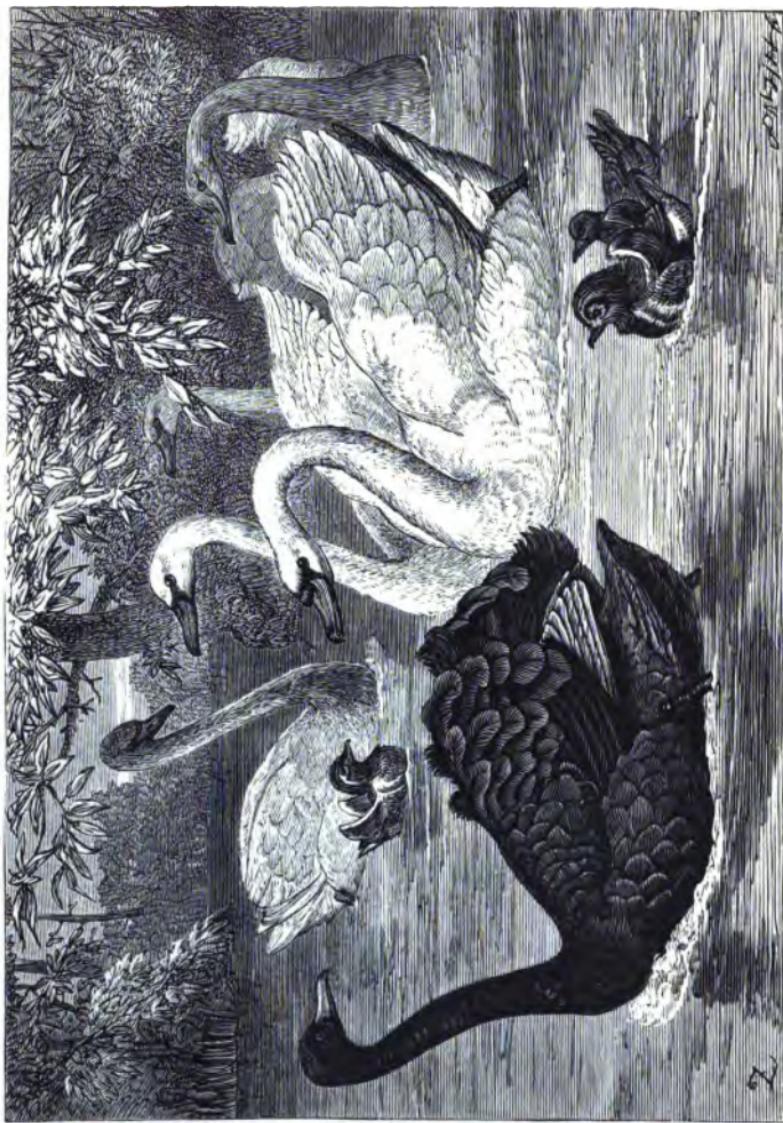




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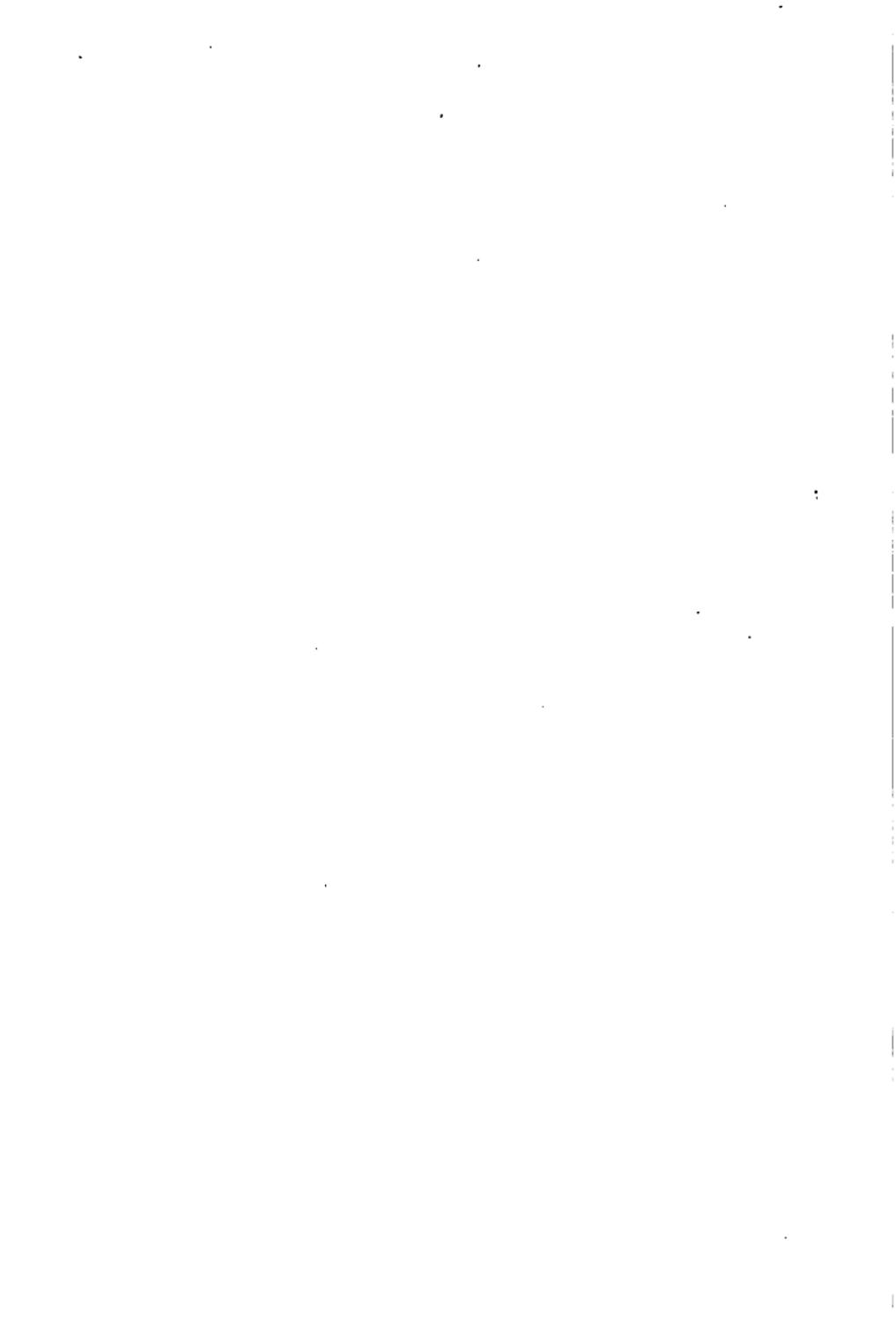
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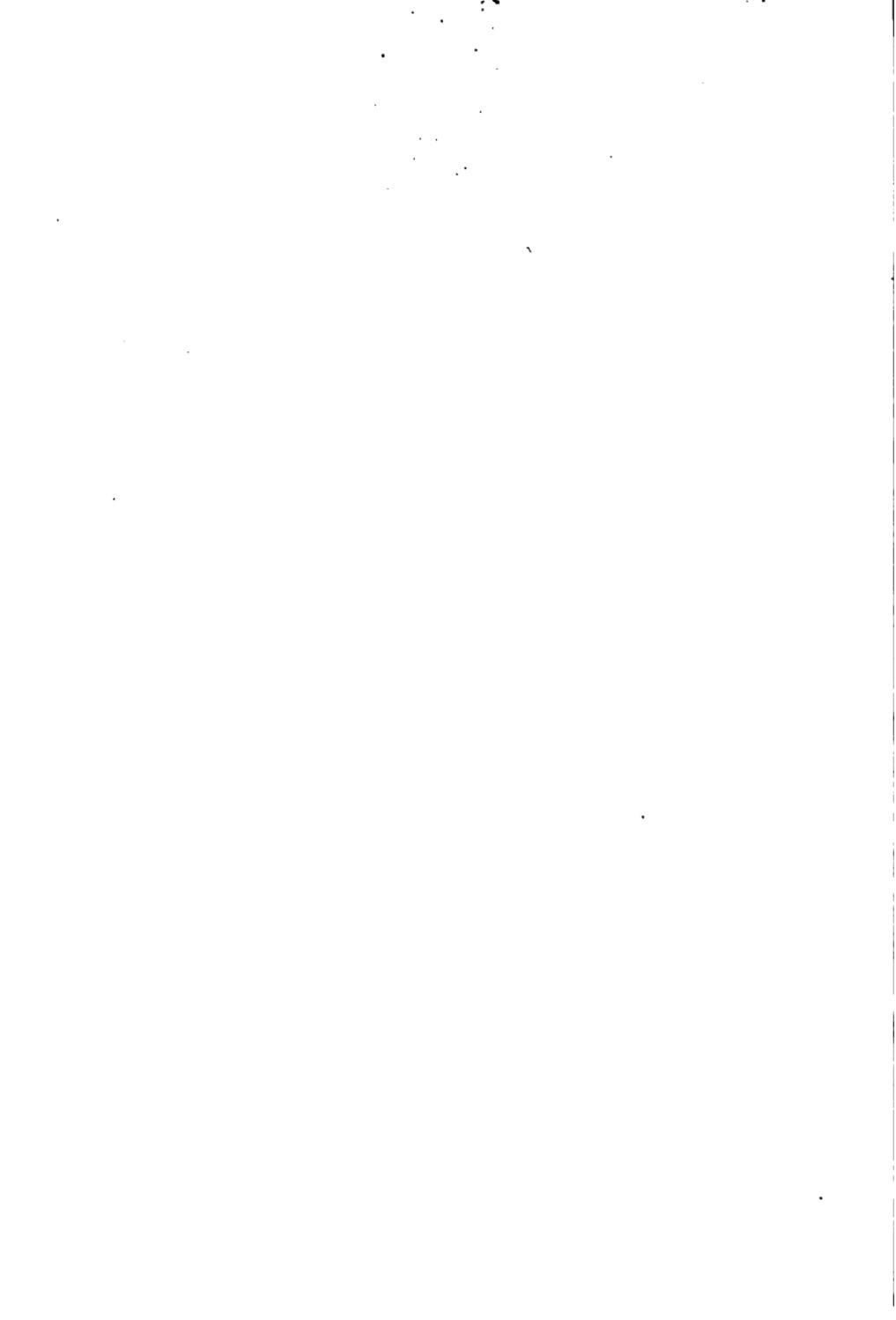
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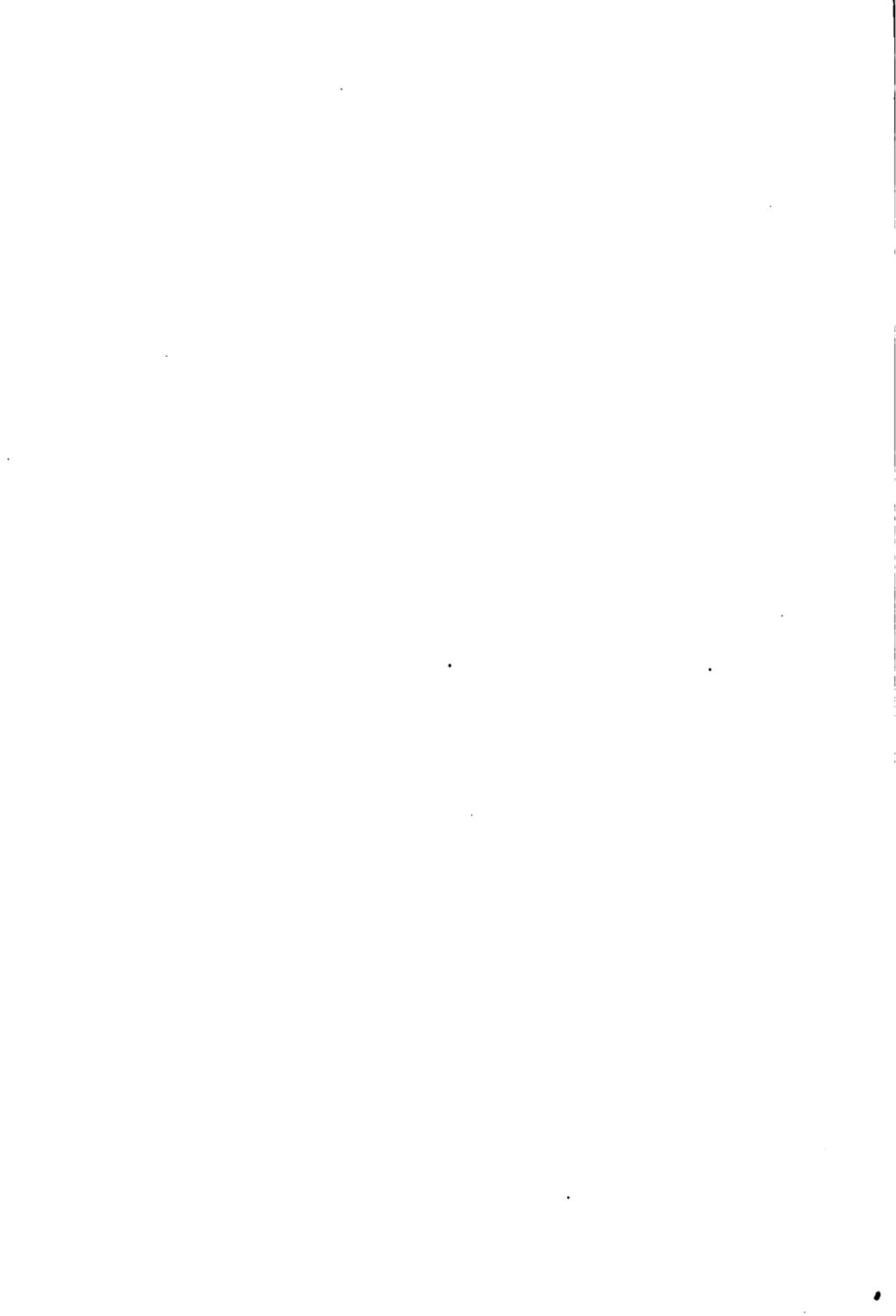


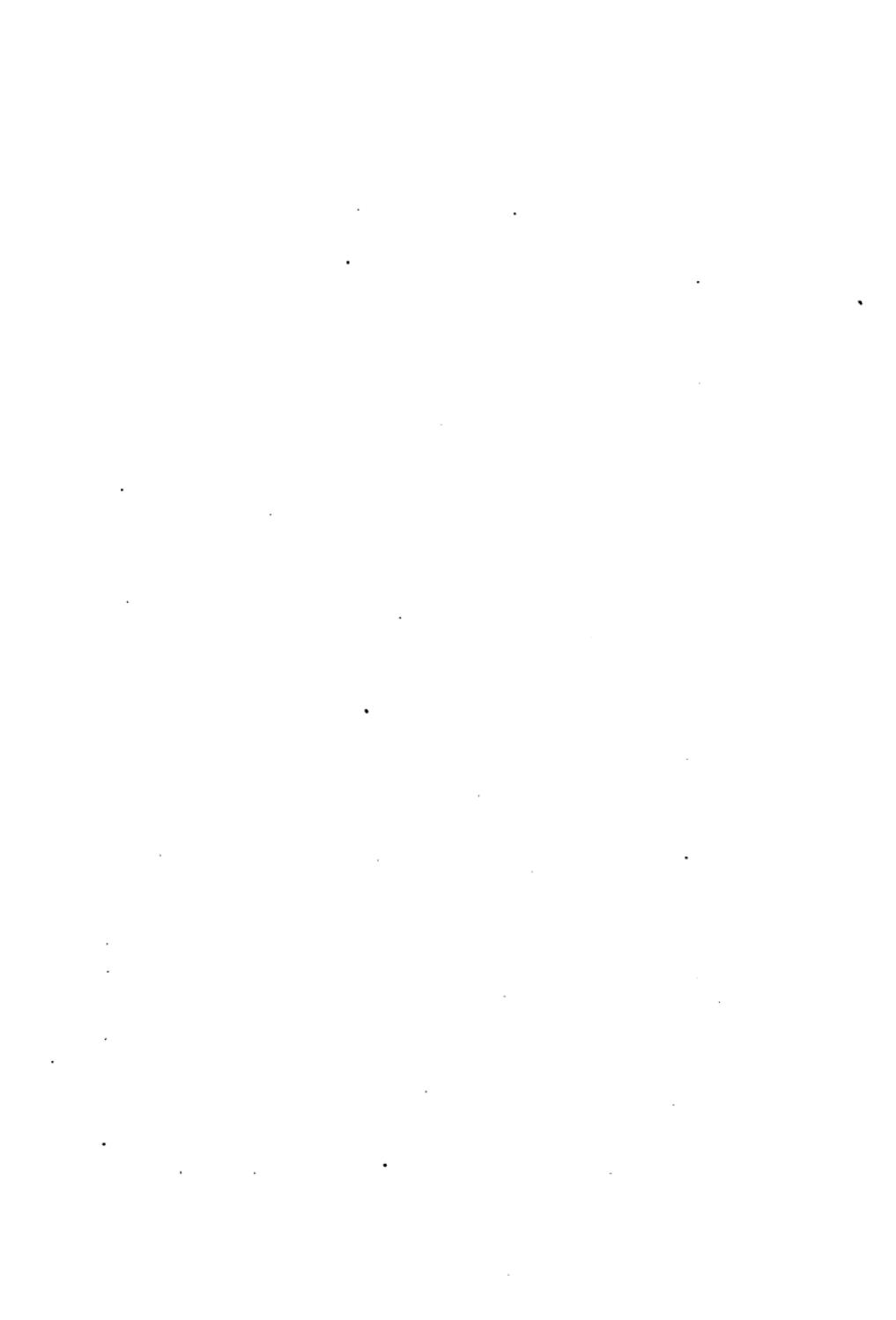
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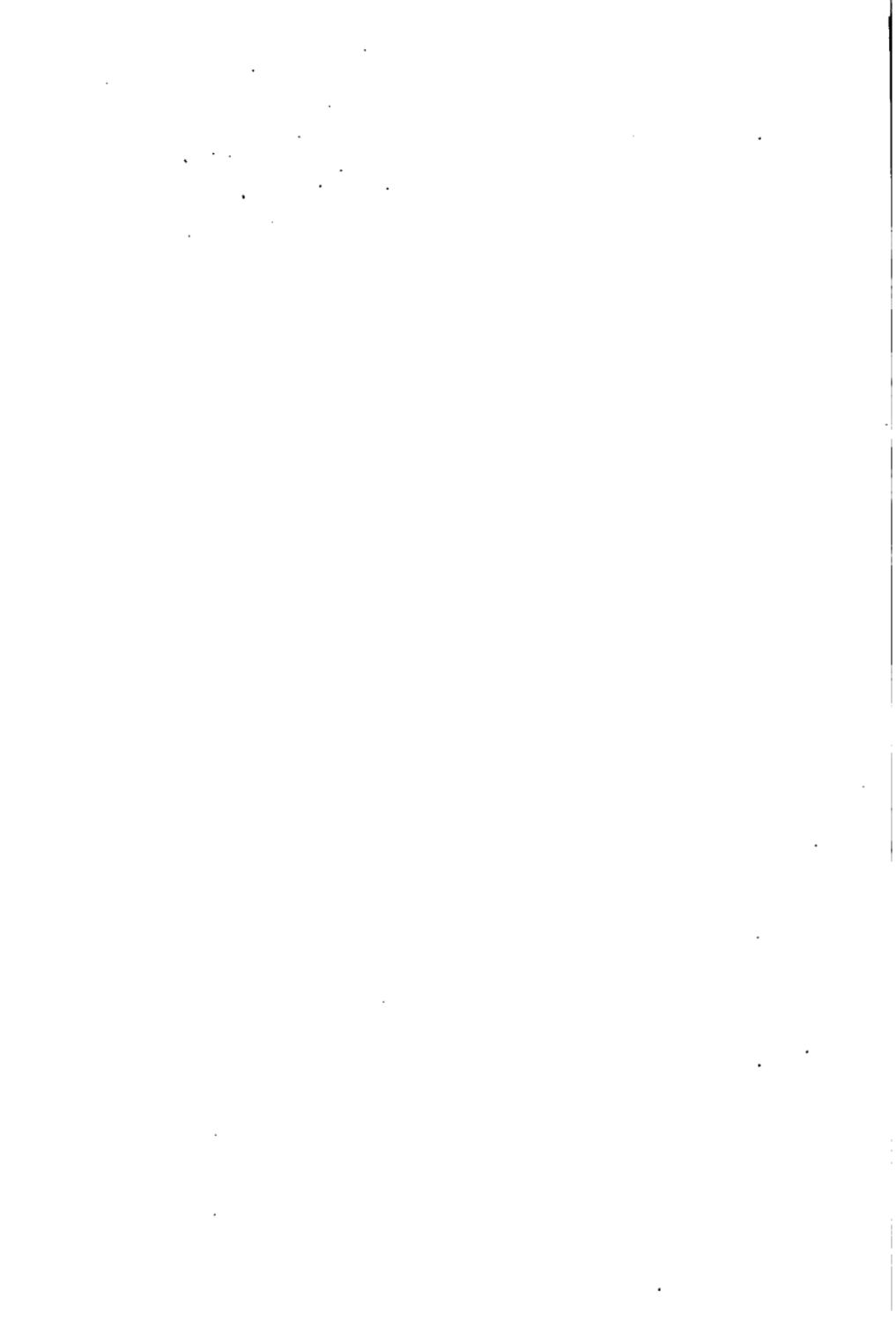
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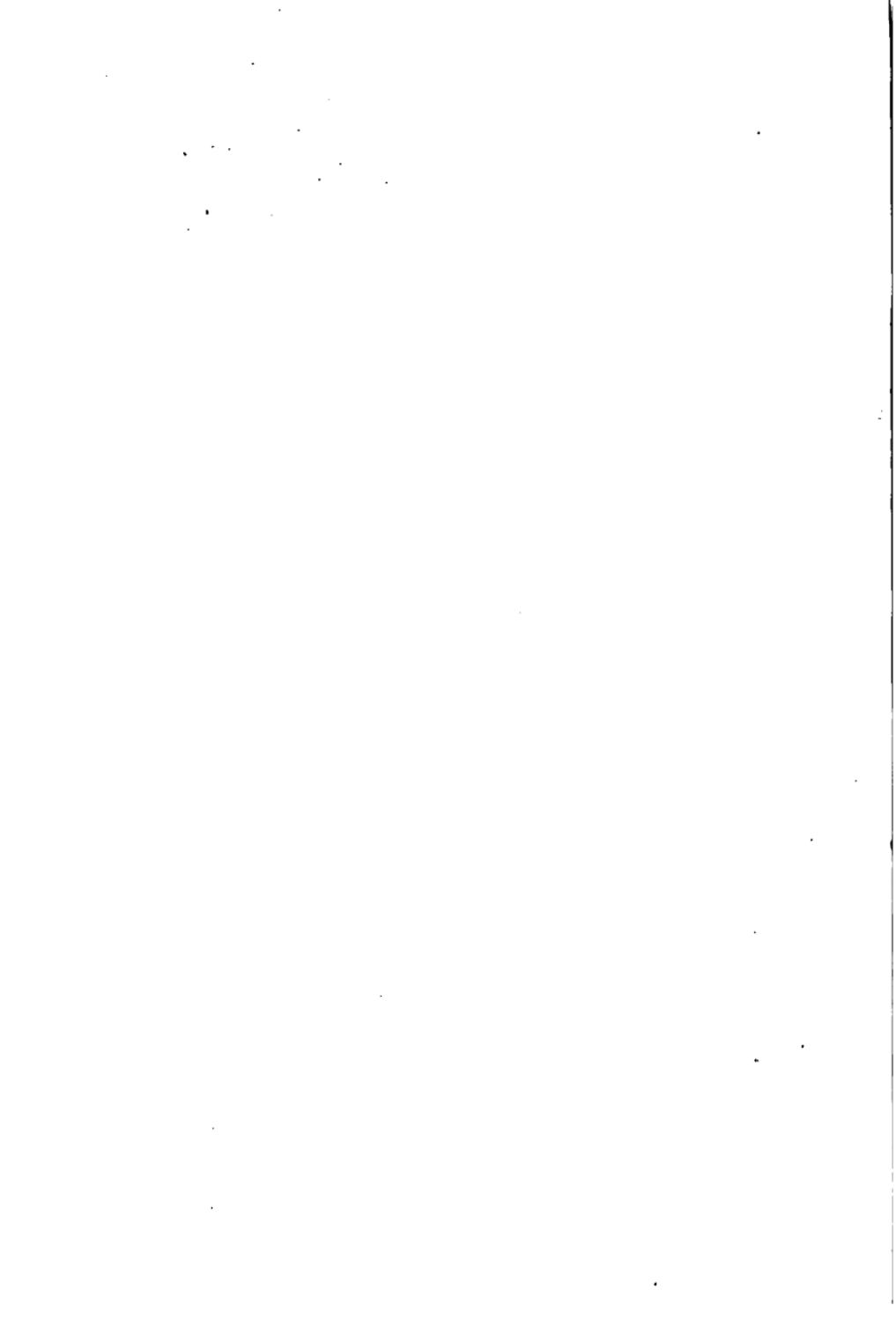






THE PINK CAT.

THERE was once a good old King, who, like most other good old kings, had an only daughter as beautiful as a star. She inherited this beauty from her mother, who had died in her infancy. King Kurmugenes himself was a very plain man. As soon as the Princess was old enough to be married, suitors came from far and wide to ask her hand, but the King would listen to none of them. The Princess Chignonette was the light of his eyes, and he could not make up his mind to part with her. "There is no man living," he said, "that I consider good enough for my daughter;" and the Princess was quite of his opinion. At last came a Prince, who was heir to five kingdoms, each larger



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than King Kurmugenes's own. He was perfectly handsome and marvellously clever. Moreover, the Princess Chignonette fell head over ears in love with him when she had only seen the nose of his charger coming in through the courtyard gates. This put the King in a difficulty, particularly as he did not wish to be considered selfish. At last an idea occurred to him.

“Prince Felifer,” said he, “last night I had a wonderful dream. I dreamed that you had bereft me of my daughter, and that I sat lonely and miserable in the castle. Suddenly the door of my chamber opened, and the most beautiful pink cat entered, with long hair, and exquisitely blue eyes. She came softly up to me, rubbed herself gently against my foot, and purred and caressed me till I felt quite consoled for the loss of my daughter. Bring me that cat, and the Princess Chignonette shall be yours.”

“But, sire,” said the young man, “in your dream the marriage took place first, then the cat arrived. Let us at once proceed with the cere-

mony, and doubtless that remarkable animal will appear, and the dream be fulfilled."

"No," said the old King; "dreams always go by the rule of contrary. In my dream the cat came after the marriage, which signifies, according to my interpretation, that in reality her arrival must take place first, and the wedding afterwards. Bring me a Pink Cat, and the Princess is yours."

Then King Kurmugenes settled himself comfortably in his arm-chair, and the Prince left the room very sorrowfully.

The Princess's governess, the Lady Gundred, was very deaf, and extremely short-sighted; so it was quite easy for anybody to enter the apartments in which she and the Princess sat without her being aware that there was a third person in the room. Prince Felifer, therefore, had no difficulty in obtaining a private interview with the Princess Chignonette.

"What is to be done, my angel?" he asked. "Your father says he will never consent to our marriage unless I bring him a pink cat."

“ Well,” said the Princess, “ you needn’t make such a long face about it—bring him a pink cat.”

“ But, my soul,” said the Prince, “ there is no such thing.”

“ Well, then, we must make one,” said the Princess.

Then she made Prince Felifer hide behind a curtain, and summoning one of her pages, desired him to fetch her a white Angora cat; and also to beg her Mistress of the Robes to wait on her.

“ Where was the late Queen’s wedding-dress sent when it was dyed blue to suit my complexion ? ” she asked, as soon as the lady and the cat appeared.

“ Your royal mother’s wedding-dress was sent to your royal highness’s dyers and cleaners in ordinary,” answered the Mistress of the Robes.

“ Very well,” said the Princess. “ Send this cat to the same place to be dyed a bright pink. Let the most trusty of my pages carry her, and let both him and the dyer be sworn to secrecy—or, stay; perhaps it would be safer if you were to convey her yourself in one of my carriages.”

“She won’t scratch, will she?” asked the Mistress of the Robes, who had a horror of cats.

“Nonsense!” said the Princess. “Here—take her!” and the poor lady left the room, holding the cat at arm’s-length.

The Prince bounded from behind the curtain with so much vigour that the Lady Gundred, who was seated on a couch at the other end of the room, exclaimed—

“What’s that, my dear?”

“Only a mouse,” answered the Princess. “You had better not come to this part of the room, for fear it might bite you.”

“Clever creature!” cried the Prince, in ecstasies. “I should never have thought of having a cat dyed.”

“Of course not,” said the Princess. “You are only a man. Now you had better return to your own apartments. I will let you know directly the cat comes home, and you can present it at once to my royal father.”

For several days the Prince was in a restless

state of anxiety. He spent his time chiefly in riding to and fro between the dyer's and the palace, and stopped every one he met carrying a basket, to ask the contents, which the good people thought rather a strange subject of curiosity for a royal prince. The Princess, on her part, sent the Mistress of the Robes twice a day in a closed carriage to the dyer's, to ask if the parcel for her royal highness were ready. But the fact was, that the poor cat objected strongly to being dyed, which delayed the business. At last she was finished. The Prince met the carriage returning, and the Mistress of the Robes put her head out of the window, and gave a slight mew, which convinced him that all was well. He followed the carriage home, and obtained admittance as soon as possible to the apartments of the Princess, whom he found embracing a splendid rose-coloured cat. He then craved audience of the King, and presenting the pink cat, proposed that the wedding should take place the following day.

The old King put on his spectacles, and looked

earnestly at the cat for a few moments. Then turning to an attendant, said—

“Wash her !”

“Excuse me,” said the Prince eagerly; “cats have such a great objection to the water.”

“Not *pink* cats !” said the King. “In my dream the beautiful creature took a bath daily. Warm water !” he added, as the cat was borne out of the room, “for fear she should take cold.”

The Prince was heart-broken. He did not wait to see the result of the bath, but at once sought the Princess Chignonette, and told her what had occurred.

“Ah !” she said, “I might have thought of that. It’s not easy to take in my royal father. He has caught something of my powers of discernment. Never mind. I shall soon devise something else.”

“My beloved one,” said the Prince, “I cannot remain here to be the laughing-stock of the menials about the court. I must return without delay to my own country. But keep up your heart. I will

search through the wide world till I find a pink cat, and then I will return and claim the fairest bride the sun ever shone on. This I will do or die!"

Then the Princess gave him a knot of crimson ribbon from her dress, on which he pressed a thousand kisses during his journey.

Now there lived not far from his father's castle Prince Felifer's former nurse, a good old woman, who loved him fondly, and who was said to be considerably wiser than most folks. To her, therefore, as soon as he had greeted his royal parents, the Prince repaired, and told his mournful tale.

"Tell me," he exclaimed, when he had finished his story, "is there any hope for me? Is there such a thing to be found on the earth's surface as a *Pink Cat*?"

"Why, yes, of course there is," answered the nurse; "but she lives far away in Catland. She's the Queen of the Cats, and has long fur of a delicate rose-colour, I've heard tell. But it's no use going after her. Nothing would make her leave

her own country. She's a very great lady, and talks as well as you or I."

"Good heavens!" cried the Prince, "you have given me new life. This very night I will start for Catland."

"Better not," said the old nurse. "It's a queer place, I've heard say, and two-legged visitors are not made over-welcome."

"Nothing shall hinder me," exclaimed the Prince. "Thwart me not, woman!" he continued, assuming a royal air, as the old nurse began another remonstrance. "This night I start, and I take with me only a trusty page, a trusty horse, and a trusty dog."

"Alas!" said the nurse, "so accompanied you will never return alive!"

"Well, perhaps not *dog*," said the Prince. "I spoke hastily. I meant my trusty sword."

"A page will be as fatal," said the nurse. "I have heard that the cats consider boys as their deadliest enemies'"

The Prince raised his right hand furtively to his

mouth and felt the down on his upper lip. "I am glad it is so advanced," he thought to himself; "but I wish it were a darker colour; perhaps it would be as well to cork it a little before I set out. There is no harm in being on the safe side." "Then I must go alone," he said aloud. "Adieu, kind nurse! Which way ought I to turn on leaving the castle gates?"

"It doesn't matter," answered the nurse, "if you ride on long enough you are sure to arrive at Catland; but coming back is a very different thing."

This puzzled the Prince. His royal parents were much surprised to hear that he was about to leave them again directly.

"Where are you going now?" they asked.

The Prince did not dare tell them the truth, for he thought they would consider it a wild goose-chase, and try to prevent it.

"I am going," he replied, "to a neighbouring kingdom, in hopes of winning the smiles of the great Queen who reigns there."

“Oh ! you faithless one !” exclaimed his lady mother. “Have you already forgotten your fair Princess ? Fie upon you !”

But in reality she was well pleased, for a Queen in her own right is of course a more desirable daughter-in-law than a mere Princess. Then the Prince begged his mother to give him some goodly gift to offer to the Queen, and she produced a casket containing a splendid diamond necklace, worth at least half a kingdom. The Prince laughed to himself as he took the casket, thinking, “What would my royal mother say did she but know that this was destined for the neck of a cat !”

Then he called for his favourite charger, and for a wallet with bread and meat, and a flask of wine for the journey, mounted, and rode away. He was so occupied with his own thoughts that he scarcely noticed which way his horse went. He was devising all sorts of schemes for making himself agreeable to the Pink Cat and inducing her to return with him. “It’s a great comfort she can talk,” he thought, “otherwise I don’t see how we

could ever have come to an understanding." All through the night he rode on, and all the next day, dismounting occasionally to refresh himself and his horse. Then they came to a dense forest. "How shall I know when I am in Catland?" he thought. On the third day he came to enormous herds of cattle with no one tending them. "Whose are these?" he wondered. They all turned round and stared at the Prince. On approaching them he perceived that each cow had a piece of pink ribbon round its neck, and this at once convinced him that they must belong to the Queen of the Cats herself, who no doubt required large supplies of milk and cream. "Then I am evidently in Catland," he thought; and sure enough there soon appeared a tortoiseshell and a grey cat of very large size sauntering about as if the place belonged to them.

Prince Felifer raised his cap politely, and the cats looked at him for a moment and then turned away as if he didn't signify.

Presently he came in sight of a motherly-looking



white cat, accompanied by three kittens also white. She had such a gentle face, and was purring so pleasantly, that the Prince ventured to address her.

“Would you be kind enough to tell me the way to the palace?” he asked. “I am very anxious for an interview with your Queen.”

The mother cat waved her paw in the direction of a park full of beautiful trees, where the Prince noticed that the sparrows were strictly preserved. In the midst he soon perceived a building painted rose colour. Before the principal entrance was a large mat of rabbit skin, and on it lay stretched at full length the most lovely animal he had ever beheld. She was about the size of a sheep dog, with long fur of the most exquisite rosy tint, something the colour of a flamingo where it is pinkest, and her eyes were of a vivid turquoise blue. Her purr, as she lay half asleep in the sun, was like a mill-wheel. The Prince dismounted from his horse and approached the beautiful creature, giving a little cough to attract her

attention, upon which she half raised herself and uncurled her magnificent tail. She quietly surveyed the Prince and his horse from head to foot, and then asked in clear silvery tones—

“To what circumstance am I indebted for the honour of this visit?”

The Prince considered a moment, and then with a low bow replied:—

“The truth is, madam, that I have heard so much of your surpassing beauty, that I could not resist the attempt to gain a sight of it myself. Day and night have I travelled, and weary and worn have I at last arrived in Catland. I need scarcely add that I find myself more than rewarded.”

The Pink Cat looked modestly down at her front paws.

“You see me to great disadvantage,” she said. “I have not yet performed my toilette.—Here Scrub !”

Instantly there appeared a large black cat with a stumpy tail and rather a hesitating manner.

“ Wash my paws,” said the Queen.

So dignified was the royal demeanour that the Prince half expected to see a golden ewer and basin produced for the purpose ; but instead Scrub approached very respectfully, took the Queen’s paws gently between her own and gave them a vigorous lick with her rough tongue.

“ Now wash my face,” said the Queen ; and the same process was repeated on the royal visage.

“ Perhaps a similar attention would refresh the gentleman after his journey,” said the Pink Cat.

“ Oh ! thank you,” replied the Prince hastily. “ You are most considerate ; but I am always accustomed to wash my own face and hands.”

“ Oh ! ” said the Pink Cat in a disappointed tone. “ I thought you were a Prince ! ”

“ So I am, I assure you.”

“ Well, to be sure, it isn’t quite the same thing as being a Queen,” said the Pink Cat. “ You see that,” she added, pointing to a small golden coronet, hanging on a nail on the door just above

her head, "that's my crown, I can't be bothered to wear it, but there it is; don't go away and say you didn't see a crown."

Then the Prince produced the casket with the diamond necklace.

"A small tribute of my admiration and devotion," he said, "which I venture to lay at the fairest feet that ever trod the grass."

"A pretty thing enough," said the Queen of the Cats. "Try the effect on Scrub's neck." But Scrub was bashful, she twisted and wriggled, and declared that her poor neck was quite unworthy of such a valuable ornament.

"Don't be a fool!" said the Queen.

Prince Felifer didn't much care about going down on his knees to a black cat with a stumpy tail; but there was no help for it, he couldn't manage to clasp the necklace without, so coy was Scrub.

When at last it was fastened the Queen burst out laughing.

"Well it does look rather unsuitable," she said,

“hang it up by the crown.” Upon which poor Scrub was more than ever overcome with confusion.

“Now,” continued the Pink Cat, “perhaps the Prince would like to be introduced to his kindred, for I assure you there are lots of you here !”

“Lots of princes ?” he asked with unfeigned astonishment.

“Well, not exactly,” replied the Queen of the Cats, “but it’s much the same thing. I keep a number of old women who live in that house yonder. I find there are some things they manage to do better than cats, or rather, I should say, they perform certain offices which cats would scarcely demean themselves to.”

“Such as — ?” said the Prince interrogatively.

“Making the beds,” replied the Queen. “Cats prefer lying on them when they are made, as is surely more fitting.”

“How did the old women come here ?” asked the Prince.

“Well,” replied the Pink Cat, “they mostly come in search of their favourite Dicks and Toms, who have strayed from home and been fortunate enough to find their way to Catland. How they laugh when their former mistresses try to induce them to return! As if any cat who had once tasted the joys of freedom would consent to go back to your country again to catch other people’s mice, and eat the scraps they don’t want, besides taking the blame for everything that goes wrong in the house.”

This speech made the Prince feel very uncomfortable. “How shall I ever get her to come?” he thought.

“Have you any difficulty in persuading the old women to remain?” he asked aloud.

“I may say they are not exactly consulted,” answered the Queen of the Cats. “Nothing unpleasant passes; but their return is delayed—indefinitely.”

“Oh!” said the Prince.

“They soon get reconciled,” went on the Pink

Cat. "They are the only specimens of the human race that I care to keep. Young women I send about their business, they are most useless creatures. Boys we strangle. I never had a full grown man before. I scarcely know how he would answer."

"What makes the cats here so large?" asked the Prince, who began to feel very uncomfortable indeed.

"Good living, and doing as one likes, I suppose," answered the Queen; "it has a wonderful effect on one's personal appearance."

"And do they always learn to talk?"

"No," answered the Queen, "only those born and bred in Catland can do that."

"Would you like to see over the palace?" she asked graciously.

"Very much," said the Prince.

"Here, Scrub! do the honours," cried the Queen, and that faithful attendant led the way into the rose-coloured house. It was entirely furnished with feather beds.

“Very comfortable! very comfortable indeed!” said the Prince, which was the only remark that occurred to him as he followed Scrub from room to room.

“Which is the Queen’s particular bed?” he asked when they had been over the whole house.

“It’s according to the sun,” answered Scrub. “She always has a room with the sun on it.”

“And suppose there is no sun out?” asked the Prince.

Scrub opened her green eyes very wide. “Don’t you know that the sun always shines in Catland?” she replied.

“What, all night?” cried the Prince.

“Her Majesty is not in the habit of lying in bed during the night,” answered Scrub coldly, for she thought the Prince was making fun of her by asking ridiculous questions. Then she led the way to the old women’s quarter, where she left him to introduce himself. The old women were charmed to see a real live two-legged Prince, and could hardly cease curtseying. The Prince asked

them many questions about their life in Catland, and whether they had no wish to return to their own country. But they all said they were quite content, and that the Pink Cat was a very kind mistress.

“Of course, she doesn’t condescend to notice us much,” they said; “but she’s easy enough to please so long as she has exactly her own way in everything.”

Presently Scrub brought a message from the Queen, to ask if the Prince would dine with her, an invitation which he was glad enough to accept, for he felt very hungry. He found the meal spread on the grass in a sunny spot. There were two bowls of cream and several dishes of fish of different kinds. The Pink Cat was waiting rather impatiently for him.

“I have had the fish cooked to-day,” she said, “out of compliment to you, as I know there is a prejudice that way in your country. I think it rather destroys the flavour myself, but that is a matter of taste.”

Two old women waited on them. The Queen lapped up her cream very rapidly, and devoured a dish or two of fish, heads and all, and then stretched herself out in the sun again. The Prince would greatly have preferred a tankard of ale to the cream, but he did not like to ask for it, so he made the best of the viands set before him. Then he looked round for his horse, which he had tied hastily to a tree, when he first presented himself to the Pink Cat, but it was gone.

“You are looking for your horse, I see,” said the Queen. “I had him taken to the stable. I never neglect dumb animals.”

“Whereabouts is the stable?” asked the Prince. “I should like to pay him a visit.”

“There is no occasion,” said the Queen shortly, “and you couldn’t possibly find the stable.”

“Perhaps the Lady Scrub would conduct me?” suggested the Prince.

“Scrub will do nothing of the kind,” said the Queen imperiously, giving her pink tail an angry switch; “she’s not a stable cat!”

The Prince did not quite like this; he thought he had a right to know how his own horse was housed, but he did not venture to press the subject further.

“Don’t talk any more,” said the Queen of the Cats presently. “Don’t you see I want to sleep? You can watch that mousehole under the wall if you want something to do.”

Then the Pink Cat half shut her eyes, and there ensued a long and rather awkward pause. Courtesy towards his hostess induced the Prince to direct his outward attention to the mousehole; but the excitement of watching it was not sufficient to keep his mind from painful and embarrassing thoughts. His hopes of prevailing on the Queen of the Cats to leave her country, and make even a temporary sojourn at King Kurmugenes’ court were becoming fainter and fainter, and there now arose in his mind a still more anxious question, how could he himself find his way home without his horse? Perhaps the Pink Cat noticed the troubled expression of his countenance through her

half-closed eyes, and her conscience smote her for her abrupt manner towards her guest, for presently she said—

“ You may scratch me very gently under the chin, if you like.”

The Prince hailed the proposition joyfully, for he felt that such a relation between himself and the Pink Cat must lead to increased intimacy and confidence, and so satisfactorily did he support the fair pink head with one hand, and gently rub the dainty fur beneath with the other, and so melodiously and contentedly did she purr, that he thought it might be a happy moment for introducing the important subject.

“ It seems almost a pity,” he began, “ that this matchless form, this exquisite pink fur, these azure eyes, and this noble tail, should be hidden in this secluded spot.”

The Pink Cat ceased purring and raised her head.

“ Secluded spot ! ” she cried. “ Catland a secluded spot ! What on earth do you mean ? ”

The Prince saw he had made a mistake.

“Well, not secluded of course,” he said. “What I meant to say was, how sad it is for the thousands of cats and human beings who inhabit the rest of the world, and never have an opportunity of visiting Catland, and gazing upon this matchless form, this exquisite pink fur, these azure eyes, and this noble tail !”

“Well,” said the Pink Cat, beginning a modest little purr again, “after all, looks aren’t everything, virtue goes for something, doesn’t it ?”

“Certainly,” said the Prince. “I was about to add—combined with such rare virtues.”

“Then rank is of some importance,” said the Queen of the Cats ; “even beauty and virtue aren’t complete without that.”

“Exactly,” said the Prince ; “*and* such exalted rank.”

The Pink Cat purred on most complacently now, and the Prince took courage to begin again.

“Did the idea ever occur to you of undertaking foreign travel, so as to give the benighted world

beyond Catland an opportunity of at least a passing glimpse of your charms ! ”

The Pink Cat was silent for an instant, and the Prince’s heart beat very fast indeed ; it was a fearfully anxious moment.

“ How absurd it is,” she said at last, “ to hear people talk on subjects about which they absolutely know nothing ! It always makes me laugh ! ”

“ I beg your pardon,” said the Prince, “ I don’t quite understand——”

“ Of course you don’t,” said the Pink Cat. “ You are utterly ignorant of the first laws of one’s very existence. You don’t know that if I were to venture outside my own kingdom, the first effect of your pestilential climate would be to deprive me of my powers of speech. See how foolish you are making yourself ! ”

The Prince’s hopes fell considerably at this announcement, but he consoled himself with the idea that after all it might be as well for him that the lady should lose her powers of speech, as a

talking cat might possibly frighten the old King and all the court out of their seven senses.

“That, of course,” he said, “would be a terrible loss to the world; but still much would remain. Surely, too, your speaking purr, your eloquent mew, and your expressive eyes, would convey as much as the language of most people.”

“There is something in that,” said the Pink Cat. “I believe I could make myself understood pretty well. But don’t let us talk any more nonsense. To-night I entertain.”

“Indeed!” said the Prince, feeling dreadfully discouraged and depressed, but trying to seem interested. “Is it a ball?”

“No,” said the Pink Cat, “it’s a *conversazione*. The cats gifted with speech talk, and the others listen. I find it a very good plan.”

“Yes, I dare say it would be,” said the Prince.

“The party assembles at sundown,” continued the Queen of the Cats. “Sprats and cream at nine; then a little cockchafering for the young people; and they all go home by moonlight.”

“What a delightful programme,” said the Prince.

It all turned out just as the Pink Cat had said. She did not exert herself at all about the affair, but simply lay on her rabbit-skin, and received her guests. Scrub appeared to be mistress of the ceremonies, and was in great excitement. She was evidently very anxious that the Prince should be impressed with the grandeur of the entertainment.

“Don’t be nervous,” she said to him. “Of course such a gathering is a formidable thing for a stranger, but nothing will be expected of you. I am so used to large assemblies myself, that I think no more of it than of lapping a saucer of milk.”

But in truth she was extremely agitated.

About seven the cats began to arrive—black and white, sandy and tortoiseshell. They all bowed and scraped to the Queen and stared at the Prince.

“Quite a small gathering to-night,” said Scrub; but really there were a good many more guests

than usual, because all were anxious for a glimpse of the stranger, though they were too well bred to show their curiosity.

The Prince really did feel very much out of his element, and at a loss for topics of conversation. It seemed to him as if he had so few interests or associations in common with the rest of the party. The Queen introduced him to several dowager cats, who each asked him how long he had been in Catland, and then seemed to think they had done their duty by him. After racking his brains for a suitable theme, he remarked to a young tortoiseshell neighbour—

“A very interesting mouse-hole that,” indicating the one the Queen had recommended to his notice.

The tortoiseshell neighbour smiled and purred, and said, “No doubt,” but did not suggest anything further on the subject, and nothing more occurred to the Prince.

The cockchafer hunt was a very pretty entertainment. The young cats sprung into the calm night air with the greatest grace and agility, and

brought down the buzzing, whirring chafers with a gentle pat from their paws. The mamma-cats looked on and criticised the performance. Soon after the party began to disperse, to the great satisfaction of the Prince, who found it very dull work indeed.

“Well,” asked the Pink Cat, when the guests were gone, “how did you enjoy yourself?”

“Very much,” answered the Prince, “very much.”

“Then I’ll send out invitations for to-morrow night,” said the Queen, which served the Prince quite right for telling such a fib.

“Pray don’t trouble yourself on my account,” said he.

“Oh! it’s no trouble to me,” answered his hostess. “Scrub arranges it all, and she likes it; she thinks it makes her seem important, don’t you, Scrub?” a joke of the Queen’s which Scrub did not seem to enter into at all.

The Prince, feeling worn out with fatigues and anxieties, now begged the Queen’s leave to retire

to rest. She grumbled out something about the utter stupidity of wasting such a beautiful night in sleep, but ended by desiring him to choose his own feather-bed, and join her at breakfast at sunrise; and he withdrew, but not to sleep. All night he lay awake considering the difficulties of his situation, and in what manner he could best gain an influence over his hostess. Flattery was certainly not distasteful to her, but he had already gone far in that line without success. She evidently had as little idea of leaving Catland at present as of flying. Then he gazed lovingly at the knot of ribbon his dear Princess had given him, and vowed a thousand times that nothing should make him return home without the Pink Cat, a resolution which was strengthened by the recollection that his horse had been taken from him.

The next day passed much like the former one. The Queen of the Cats had no intention that her guest should quit Catland at present. It was her pleasure that he should dance attendance on her all day long, lying near her in the sun, rubbing her

gently under the chin, and between her ears, when she felt inclined, and watching mouse-holes with her by the hour. During the brief intervals when she retired to her feather-bed, the Prince employed himself in searching for his horse, but without any success. At night there was another reception, which he found even duller than the former one. A fine grey kitten was presented to the Queen of the Cats for the first time, and all the other guests seemed engaged in discussing her personal appearance. Two dowager cats, seated one on each side of the Prince, kept arguing across him, and not very good temperedly, as to whether her paws were black underneath or not. This was ill-bred, and also very tiresome, as the Prince himself had no opinion on the subject, and did not care which way it was. A young sandy cat sang. The performance was not very sweet, but still she did her best, and the Prince thought somebody might as well have listened, whereas all the cats gifted with speech talked on hard through it all. The others showed their indifference by turning their backs on

the singer. When the song was over, the Queen of the Cats thanked the young sandy cat most graciously, and said it had been a great treat; which surprised the Prince, as she had been having an earnest conversation with her prime minister, Grimalkin, all the time, and he felt sure she could not have heard a note.

When the party broke up, to his great relief, the Queen said nothing about giving another; indeed, she seemed quite pleased at being alone with the Prince again. Day after day he passed at her side, and very monotonous work he found it; but he was obliged to seem as contented and happy as possible, so anxious was he not to offend his hostess. The worst of it was that poor Scrub became frightfully jealous of him. It certainly was hard on her, as she had been used to be constant companion and confidante of the Queen, who now scarcely seemed to need her attentions at all, except when she wanted her face and hands washed. Scrub never lost an opportunity of saying something unpleasant to the Prince; but he was determined to take her

rudest speeches in good part, which was perhaps more provoking to her than anything.

“How very awkward it must be,” she would say, “to have only two legs.”

“It is,” the Prince would answer, “a very great inconvenience.”

“And no tail to switch away the flies ! ”

“That is also a serious deprivation.”

“And such a smooth, useless sort of tongue that one can’t even wash one’s own front paws with ! ”

“It is indeed a cruel mortification.”

On one occasion, when the Prince was engaged in stroking his hostess’s head, Scrub, who was sitting near, looking on angrily with her green eyes, ventured to interpose with—

“My royal mistress doesn’t like to have her fur rubbed just there, under her left ear.”

“I do,” said the Pink Cat; “I like it particularly.

“I beg your highness’s pardon,” said Scrub; “but surely it isn’t long since you desired me to avoid that spot during my ministrations ? ”

"Very likely," answered the Queen; "your rough ways are quite a different thing;" which speech completely annihilated poor Scrub.

The Prince was much concerned at her spitefulness. He had hoped for her assistance in the matter next his heart. Once he ventured to broach to her the subject of the advantages of foreign travel for the Queen; but she snubbed him so decidedly that he saw her influence would be exercised entirely against him.

Several days passed before he dared mention the matter again to the Queen herself. This time he began on quite a different tack.

"Do you know, madam," said he, "that one of my chief objects in visiting Catland was to convey to you a message?"

"Then I should think you might have conveyed it before this time," said the Pink Cat.

"Well, it was not exactly a message," said the Prince; "it was in fact an invitation."

"It's all the same thing," said the Queen; "don't make false excuses. Who could have the

presumption to send me an invitation, I should like to know?"

"It was couched in the most respectful terms," went on the Prince; "an entreaty from King Kurmugenes that you would visit his court, where you would be the object of his ceaseless devotion—a star of such wondrous lustre that those already shining there would look pale and dim beside it."

The Prince felt as if he had done pretty well when he had made this speech, but the Pink Cat only said "Pooh!" She looked rather pleased, however.

"If I might be your guide and protector during the journey," continued the Prince, taking courage, "how honoured should I be!"

The Queen of the Cats closed her eyes, and pretended to be asleep. This was very mortifying. Presently she said—

"Would you like shrimp or oyster sauce to-day at dinner?" and the Prince felt crushed. What annoyed him as much as anything, too, was that he fancied he heard a subdued chuckle from Scrub,

behind a rose-bush. By way of encouraging himself, he took the crimson knot of ribbon out of his pocket, and looked at it for a moment. He thought, as the Queen appeared to be asleep, she would not notice him; but her eyes were not so tight shut as they seemed to be, for she exclaimed, "What's that?" in a sharp tone, that sounded very like a "Fuff" from an ordinary cat.

The Prince was rather confused, but he thought it best to put a good face on the matter.

"It is only a bit of ribbon, supposed to be of peculiarly fine workmanship," he said, holding it out to her.

"Ugh!" cried the Queen, "don't put it near my pink fur. Had you really the inconceivably bad taste to suppose I would wear it?—*red ribbon on my pink fur!*"

"Well—no," said the Prince.

"It looks to me," continued the Queen sternly, "uncommonly as if it had belonged to some young woman! I have seen such things upon them. I thought better of you. I would not have supposed

that you would have consorted with that most contemptible race. I am disappointed in you. I had rather you did not stroke my head any more to-day." And with extreme dignity the Queen of the Cats turned deliberately round, and lay with her back to the Prince. Just then Scrub appeared, her countenance beaming, and with all the air of a peacemaker.

"Dear madam!" she said, "let me beg of you to be composed."

"What do you mean?" answered the Queen. "I am as composed as possible!"

"Pray forgive the Prince," went on Scrub, with eager kindness in her tone. "That ribbon has some special charm for him. I see him gazing at it, and even pressing his lips to it whenever your Highness is looking another way. Remember that he is a stranger among us, and though we enjoy his bodily presence, we cannot expect to engross his mind and heart. When he lies awake at night, I am sure it would grieve you to hear him sigh."

“I haven’t heard a word you’ve been saying,” said the Queen to Scrub. “If the Prince has nothing better to occupy his thoughts with than ribbon and young women, I am sorry for him, but it is a subject in which I take no sort of interest. I beg that I may not be disturbed again. You may stay by me, if you like, Scrub.”

Scrub sat meekly down by her mistress, and presently the Prince heard a whispering going on between them, catching words from Scrub to the effect that a poor creature like the Prince, who, after all, had been an actual *boy* not so very long ago, could not be expected to appreciate fully his privilege of being chosen companion to the Queen of the Cats; “a privilege,” she added, “so inestimably valued by your poor Scrub.”

“Ah!” answered the Queen, “I believe you are a faithful creature; but never presume to give advice again, Scrub, because that comes ill from a personal attendant.”

“Quite so—quite so,” answered Scrub; “but your Majesty seems to take such a curious satis-

faction in the company of that poor young man, that I could not but do my best to heal any breach which might deprive you of it, unaccountable as it may seem to me."

"Well, well," said the Queen, "never mind. You and I will dine together to-night, and the Prince can have our leavings—eh, Scrubby?" This was a diminutive which the Queen never used but when Scrub was in the highest favour, and she felt proportionably elated.

"Without presuming to offer advice," she said, "I would venture to suggest that fish-bones and empty saucers would be too harsh a measure. A little more reserve of manner on your part would surely be enough to bring the Prince to a higher appreciation of the position he appears to undervalue."

"Perhaps so," said the Queen of the Cats; "we'll see." In truth, she was already beginning to feel very dull without the Prince's society.

"As you are in such a peace-making mood, Scrub," she said presently, "perhaps you can

suggest some course (without appearing in any way to dictate to me) by which I might bring the poor young man again into moderate favour, without sacrificing my own dignity."

The delighted Scrub thought for a moment, and then turned to the Prince, saying—

"That red rosette would make a pretty play-thing for the Queen, tied to the end of a string, and dangled. She likes anything of the kind."

"I don't mind trying," said the Pink Cat without looking round, thus combining graciousness and dignity.

The Prince felt all the cruel ingenuity of this plan keenly, but there was no help for it. He was obliged to produce a piece of string from his pocket, and deliberately tie the precious relic to it, and dance it about for the Queen's amusement, now making it crawl along the ground like a mouse, and then jumping it into the air, while she crouched, and darted, and sprang, and caught it in her front paws, rolled over with it, kicked at it, and bit and clawed it, all with the most intense

satisfaction, Scrub meanwhile looking on with a malicious grin. It seemed to the poor Prince as if his heart were undergoing the same process, every rent in the ribbon causing it fresh laceration. "What would my dear Princess think if she could see this?" he thought; "and yet it is all for her sake!"

When the rosette was fairly in shreds, the Queen seemed completely mollified.

For some days after this little episode, the Prince felt very hopeless. The loss of his precious knot of ribbon preyed on his spirits, and he tortured his brain in vain for any new argument which might prevail on the Pink Cat to overcome her objection to leaving her country. At last an idea occurred to him, which he thought might possibly be worked out to his advantage.

One day, when alone with the Pink Cat, he remarked carelessly, "What a faithful, attached attendant your Highness has in Scrub!"

"She's a good creature enough!" said the Queen, "and knows her position."

“Perfectly,” answered the Prince. “I have noticed her conduct on several occasions, when she is obliged to differ from you in anything, it is always done so deferentially.”

“Hum!” said the Queen, “I don’t see what she could venture to differ from me about.”

“Well, no, to be sure,” answered the Prince, “I ought not to have used the word *differ*. What I meant to express was that she is not a mere milk-and-water cat. She has her own opinions, which she is of course quite ready to yield to yours in ordinary matters; but if anything that she considered really important to your welfare were in question, you would find her, I venture to predict, perfectly true to your real good!”

“What on earth do you mean?” said the Queen. “As if Scrub could possibly be a better judge of what was for my good than I could! What new nonsense is this?”

“Oh! nothing at all!” answered the Prince. “Of course she could not *really* be a better judge than you, but she might fancy herself so, and then

I am convinced she would act according to her conscience, and use all the influence she could bring to bear for what she considered best. That is what I call being a really faithful servant."

"How ridiculous!" said the Pink Cat; "as if anything Scrub could think or say would influence me!"

The Prince smiled and caressed the soft pink head, as he answered: "And yet even the great and good may be influenced by their inferiors without knowing it."

"The great and good may," said the Pink Cat, drawing herself up, "but not the greatest and best!"

"A little instance of your faithful Scrub's clear-sightedness and good sense struck me very much the other day," went on the Prince. "You remember my wild idea of persuading you to quit Catland for a time, and visit King Kurmunes's court?"

"It was a very wild idea," replied the Pink Cat.

"Since I have become better acquainted with

Catland, and all the glories of the high position you occupy here," continued the Prince, "I have understood the absurdity of it; but at that time, in my ignorance, I broached the idea to Scrub. I shall never forget her straightforward indignation. She thought it a most unsuitable scheme, and was determined to set her face steadily against it. As it turned out, your own views agreed exactly with hers; but had it been otherwise, I believe she would never have given her consent!"

"What should I ask her consent for?" said the Queen.

"I have that high opinion of Scrub," said the Prince firmly, "that I verily believe she would have refused to accompany you—a strong measure, but the only one in her power, to prevent your taking so rash a step; indeed, she as good as told me so."

"Good gracious!" cried the Queen, "do you suppose that *that* would have stopped me? Do you fancy that I can't move without Scrub at my heels? Are you aware," she continued, drawing

up her splendid pink proportions to their full height, "that you are speaking to the Queen of the Cats?"

"I know it," said the Prince; "and I believe that your faithful servant would guard your dignity with her ninth life, if need be; but let us change the subject. The result of my proposition to you showed her wisdom, for you see her view exactly coincided with yours."

"But I shall *not* change the subject," said the Pink Cat; "I consider that it was very impertinent of Scrub to give any opinion at all on the matter, and if I were to take it into my head to leave Catland, and visit King Kurmugenes's or King anybody else's court, I should do so without consulting her in the least—there!"

"Dear madam, be calm," said the Prince. "I am truly sorry I mentioned this subject. Surely your devoted Scrub has earned the title to have at least a little influence where your interest is concerned. There is no question of its being exercised on this occasion, you are so entirely of one mind."

“I am not at all sure,” said the Queen. “I never promised Scrub or any one else that I would remain in Catland all my days, and what’s more, I won’t. Here Scrub, Scrub !”

The faithful attendant soon appeared.

“Order the Prince’s horse to be brought round immediately,” said the Queen, drawing herself up majestically. “I am about to accompany him on a visit to his country.”

The green eyes of Scrub dilated with horror. So the Prince had triumphed, after all, and her royal mistress was willing even to leave her own kingdom for his sake. For a moment she remained speechless.

“Let me beg of your Highness to reconsider your determination,” she said at last in trembling tones.

“Order round the Prince’s horse immediately,” repeated the Pink Cat, “and send a message to Lord Grimalkin to attend on me. I shall leave the kingdom in his charge.”

The Prince was in ecstasies; he could really

hardly believe in his own success. While the Queen gave a few parting directions to her Prime Minister, he bid an affectionate farewell to the old women who provided him with refreshments for the journey for himself and their royal mistress. Now that he was about to leave Catland, he felt on the most friendly terms with all its inhabitants, even with Scrub. His horse, which was soon led round by an old woman, looked glossy and well-cared for; and as the Queen of the Cats travelled without luggage, there was no further delay. She requested the Prince to mount, and then sprang up and seated herself just in front of him, and waving a farewell to the still petrified Scrub, they rode off. They had hardly started, however, when the Queen began to repent.

“That was a very good joke,” she said, “and a useful lesson to Scrub, who is really getting too officious. Now I think we’ll turn back.”

“That’s just what Scrub prophesied would happen,” said the Prince. “She said, ‘The Queen may go with you a little way, but she will never

cross the boundaries of her own kingdom.' What wonderful foresight that good creature is gifted with."

"She was out in her calculations this time," said the Queen, "for I shan't go back; I was only in fun. Put your horse to a gallop."

"Pray hold on firmly with your noble claws," said the Prince. "I should never forgive myself if any accident were to happen."

"You needn't be afraid of any accident happening to me," said his companion. "You know how many lives a common cat has?"

"Certainly," said the Prince.

"Well, how many do you think the Queen of the Cats has?"

"Nineteen, perhaps," hazarded the Prince.

"Nine thousand, nine hundred, and ninety-nine," said the Pink Cat, very slowly, and the Prince was quite as awe-struck as she expected; his own one poor little life seemed so utterly insignificant in contrast.

As they passed through the surrounding country,

the cats all came out of their houses and cheered ; the Queen bowing graciously from side to side.

“ I suppose we shall have a magnificent reception when we arrive at King Kurmugenes’s kingdom,” she said.

“ To be sure,” said the Prince ; but in his heart he felt rather uncomfortable about the reception of the Pink Cat. Doubtless she would be made a great deal of as a cat, but that is not quite the same thing as being received as a Queen, which was what he had led her to expect. He tried to put misgivings aside, however, and make the journey as agreeable as possible to his companion. At length they came in sight of the forest.

“ What a gloomy looking — ” began the Queen, and then she stopped, and ended her sentence with a piteous mew. They had passed the boundaries of Catland, and she had lost her power of speech. The Prince urged on his steed as fast as possible, in an agony of fear, lest she should spring to the ground in a rage, and fly

back to Catland. Nothing of the kind happened, however. The Pink Cat had made up her mind to go through with the whole thing, and contented herself with giving utterance to a series of the most gigantic mews, which made the Prince feel exceedingly uncomfortable.

“Words fail me to express my regret for what has occurred,” said he. “I can only ask your pardon most humbly, in the name of my country, for having brought this great inconvenience on you.”

“Mee—ow—ow—ow,” went the Pink Cat; and so they rode on, the Prince apologising, and the Queen caterwauling.

It certainly was disagreeable riding through a lonely forest, for miles, and miles, and miles, with an enormous pink cat howling like a demon, sitting just in front of one. The Prince could hardly resist putting his hands over his ears to keep out some of the dismal sound, but refrained for two reasons. First, because he wanted the use of both hands to hold his reins and whip, and

next because if the Pink Cat should happen to turn round it would not look civil.

When they halted for refreshments, the Queen of the Cats recovered her spirits a little. She lapped up several saucers of milk, which the Prince poured out for her with the greatest respect and tenderness, sharpened her claws on the barks of several trees, chased a butterfly, rolled over in the sun to be stroked, even purred slightly, and finally scampered up a tall tree, and perched on the topmost branch, where she looked like a great pink squirrel. There she recommenced her terrible mewing, this time with an intonation of supplication in it.

“What is the matter now?” thought the Prince in despair.

“What can I do for you, you beautiful creature?” screamed he. “Have you any difficulty in coming down?” A howl of indignation was the answer to this suggestion.

“What can she want?” he wondered. “Perhaps a game;” and he began playfully to pelt her

with beech-masts. This elicited a fearful snarling, and even a "Sshp," which there was no misunderstanding. It was evidently not what was desired, and gradually dawned upon the Prince the terrible idea that she wanted him to join her. There was no help for it, for she was so obstinate that he felt sure she would never come down at all unless she had her way. Alas ! for silken hose and lace ruffles ; up the Prince had to clamber, arriving at last, panting and breathless, at the Pink Cat's side. The moment he got there, down she sprang again, and leaping lightly from bough to bough, reached the ground in a moment. "Nice sort of game this," thought the Prince. "I suppose directly I get down up she'll go again, and so on ;" and it turned out just as he feared. The moment his feet touched the ground, up she bounded. "All very well for you, you wonderful creature !" cried the Prince in his despair, "with your four legs and your nine thousand lives ; but a very different thing for me with my single pair of legs, and my one poor little life." The truth of

this remark seemed to strike the Queen of the Cats pleasantly, for she came down amiably enough. In fact, this confession of her immense superiority on the part of the Prince, could not but be gratifying. The next thing was to coax her to remount the gallant steed, which stood quietly grazing till they were ready. The Prince grudged every moment which delayed them on their journey; but the Pink Cat was in no hurry, and to his vexation, hours passed away before she could be induced to start again. She did not object to travelling at night, but was determined to have her sleep comfortably in the daytime. The provisions falling short was no inconvenience to her, as there was not the least difficulty in her killing a bird or a rabbit any moment. The Prince was not so easily accommodated, and his companion's mirth was unbounded at his attempts to cook his share of the game.

It was a most tedious journey to the Prince, and when, after five days and five nights on the road, the turrets of his father's castle

appeared in sight, his heart bounded with joy. He determined, however, not to pause in his own city, for fear that the Queen of the Cats might receive but a cold reception from his lady mother, who would be dreadfully disappointed that he did not bring her a grand daughter-in-law. He therefore turned his horse's head at once in the direction of King Kurmugenes's kingdom. As he rode through the city the populace cheered him lustily. The Pink Cat took the compliment all to herself, and bowed as graciously as in her own country, and the people were so amused at their Prince being accompanied in such a manner, that they called out, "Three' cheers for Prince Felifer, and three for the Pink Cat !"

At last they reached King Kurmugenes's city, where the appearance of the Prince and his companion produced the greatest possible excitement, for all the inhabitants knew of the hard condition their King had made, and rejoiced at the poor young man's unlooked-for success. As soon as they arrived at the palace, Prince Felifer de-

manded to be conducted at once into the presence of the Princess Chignonette, whom he was naturally all impatience to see. The Queen of the Cats walked by his side, with her pink tail perfectly erect, and a most majestic air. They were shown into a magnificent apartment, where the Princess and all her ladies sat at work. The Princess sprang forward and threw herself on her knees by the Pink Cat.

“ Oh ! you beautiful, glorious, lovely, creature !” she exclaimed, and all the ladies came round and said the same. The Queen of the Cats was quite satisfied with her reception. She arched her neck for the caresses of a dozen pair of fair hands and set up a gentle purr.

The Princess Chignonette soon drew the Prince aside and whispered—

“ *Will it come off?* ”

“ I trust so,” answered the Prince. “ I earnestly hope that our marriage may take place the first thing to-morrow morning.”

“ Pshaw ! ” said the Princess ; “ I mean the

pink colour ; are you sure it won't come off, even with soda ? ”

“ Positive,” said the Prince. “ She’s perfectly pink by nature, and let me tell you, moreover, that she’s the Queen of the Cats, and understands every word that is said. Pray treat her with the greatest possible deference. Your reception was admirable. I could not have wished better.”

The Princess burst out laughing at this.

“ Oh, don’t tell my royal father and the courtiers,” she cried ; “ they’ll be frightened out of their wits.”

“ Hush, my angel,” said the Prince ; “ she might hear you.”

“ But it’s the most comical idea I ever heard of in my life,” said the Princess.

It had not struck the Prince in this point of view.

“ My own,” he said, “ I implore you to be cautious, any approach to levity regarding her, were it to reach her ears, might destroy the whole thing.”

The Princess fairly danced with delight at this speech, to the Prince’s great distress.

“ You had better present her at once to my royal father,” she said, “ in case of accidents ; and I will order all the castle gates to be locked, for fear she should try to escape.”

“ I should like a velvet cushion for her to be carried in on,” said the Prince, gravely ; “ and four serving-men to bear it. I shall walk by the side.”

“ Very well,” said the Princess, and she ordered a crimson velvet cushion to be brought.

“ Now, madam,” said the Prince in a low voice to the Pink Cat, “ may I ask you to mount ? ”

The serving-men knelt down with the cushion at a sign from the Prince, and the Queen of the Cats immediately stuck her claws into it with a snarl, and nearly tore off one of the tassels. The serving-men drew back rather alarmed.

“ You needn’t be afraid of her not being treated with respect you see,” whispered the Princess.

The Prince was perplexed. What could have annoyed the Pink Cat ?

“ I know,” he said, after a moment’s thought,

“it’s the colour, most unbecoming to her pink fur, how thoughtless of me !”

Then a green cushion was ordered, and on to this the Queen of the Cats condescended to step, settling herself upon it in a position of ease and dignity. The King was seated in his favourite arm-chair, reading, when an usher announced—

“ His Royal Highness Prince Felifer and a Pink Cat.”

“ Wash her !” said the old King, without even looking up from his book.

Who shall describe the indignation of the Queen of the Cats when she heard these words. With a frightful yell she sprang to the ground and raced away down the great stairease. The Prince rushed after her in the greatest dismay, followed by the serving-men, calling—

“ Puss, puss, puss, pretty Puss !”

“ Silence knaves !” said the Prince. “ Call her madam.”

“ Here, mad—mad—madam !” cried the serving-men.

“Fools!” exclaimed the Prince, “leave the guest to me;” which they were glad enough to do, for in truth they were in mortal fear of the great fierce cat.

She meanwhile had rushed frantically down one passage and then another, and, finding no outlet anywhere, had hidden herself under a huge oak chest. The Prince could hear her low growl, and see two great eyes glaring underneath. He stretched himself full length on the ground, so as to bring his face on a level with her.

“How can I express my sorrow for this misunderstanding,” said he, “for my own dense stupidity in not explaining the customs of our country to you before. The King meant no offence, far from it. He was only paying you the highest honour. When a great Queen or an Empress arrives from a foreign country, a bath of otto of roses is immediately offered her. The King was merely signifying to his attendants that the same costly refreshment was to be prepared for you. No Queen has ever rejected the attention;

indeed the taste for an otto of rose bath is, if I may so express it, one of the *attributes* of royalty."

On this the Queen of the Cats crawled sulkily out, feeling rather ashamed of herself, and followed the Prince into an adjoining apartment. The Prince then gave a hasty order for a bath of warm rose-water to be prepared, and into this the poor Pink Cat was persuaded to step. She loathed it with an inexpressible loathing, but was determined not to show it, for fear of being thought less regal in her tastes than other queenly visitors. When she came out all shivering, and looking half her usual size, but pink as ever, the old King was summoned. He gazed at her long and earnestly through his spectacles, and could not but be convinced.

"He is struck dumb with admiration," whispered the Prince to the Queen of the Cats.

"Who'd have thought it? who'd have thought it?" the old King kept repeating to himself, but no word of welcome passed his lips, and the Pink

Cat soon began to snarl at him. The Prince could restrain his eagerness no longer.

“I have earned my prize!” he cried. “When may the wedding be?”

The Queen of the Cats pricked up her pink ears; she began to suspect a plot.

“I acknowledge you have earned your reward,” said the old King with a heavy sigh. “My dream is fully realised, and my gratification at possessing such an incomparable animal unbounded. The marriage shall take place shortly. In the meantime I shall not forbid your having an occasional interview with the Princess Chignonette, in the presence of one or more of her ladies: one of the waiting-men shall conduct you to her apartments.”

The Prince laughed to himself at this, for he should never have thought of asking the King’s leave for an interview with the Princess, and knew his way perfectly to her apartments, but he bowed low and expressed his gratitude.

The King now approached the Pink Cat, who was drying herself by the fire.

“She is the gentlest, most sweet-tempered——” began the Prince, but he was interrupted by a gigantic “Sshp !” which made the old King nearly tumble backwards.

“It appears to me,” said he, “to be an exceedingly savage animal.”

The wrath of the Queen of the Cats at hearing herself spoken of as *it* reached its climax. She crouched low, her eyes glaring, and the Prince feared she would spring at the old King’s throat: he threw himself between them, and the King beat a hasty retreat followed by the serving-men.

“Pray calm yourself, madam,” said the Prince when he found himself alone with the Pink Cat. “It grieves me that the manners of the Court are so distasteful to you; I would not detain you a moment longer than is agreeable to you on any account. Pray return to Catland whenever it suits you. I wish I could offer to accompany you, but I have a little matter on hand here which will detain me for the present.”

The Pink Cat pondered. Should she take her

departure at once? She could find her way to Catland with the greatest ease, and she felt sure no one would dare to annoy her on the road. But no, she would not play into the Prince's hands in that sort of way. It was evident she had been made a tool of, though she could not exactly understand how. She perceived that the Prince had gained his object, and no longer desired her presence, and she was determined that he should not be gratified. She would remain and find out what it all meant.

"I will now leave you to repose after the fatigues of your journey, and order some refreshments to be served for you," continued the Prince, who was in a great hurry to get back to his Princess. He found her alone this time save for the presence of the Lady Gundred, who was more deaf and short-sighted than ever, and they were soon engaged in a most interesting conversation. In the midst came a tremendous scratching at the door. The Prince rose hastily and opened it, and in walked the Pink Cat with an indifferent sort of

manner. The Princess Chignonette was provoked at the interruption, for the Prince did not return at once to her side, but kept fussing about to find soft cushions for the Queen of the Cats, and hoping that she felt quite dry and comfortable again, etc.

“Can’t you leave the cat alone?” said the Princess crossly.

The Prince took out his memorandum-book hastily, and wrote in it—

“Pray do not speak of her in that sort of way, you forget that she understands every word.”

He then tore out the leaf and handed it to the Princess.

“Pooh!” she said, when she had read it and tore it across.

This vexed the Prince, and he wrote on another leaf—

“It is not safe to offend her, she is very powerful.”

“Pooh!” said the Princess again.

Much hurt, the Prince wrote on a third leaf—

“She might fly at your throat and strangle you in an instant.”

On perusing this last communication the Princess Chignonette set up a piercing shriek, which brought the Lady Gundred from her corner, while several ladies came rushing in from an adjoining apartment, with fans and bottles of salts. The Prince threw himself on his knees by her, implored her pardon for having alarmed her, and swore in a whisper that nothing should ever harm her while he was near to protect her. Much disgusted at this pantomime the Queen of the Cats rose majestically and left the room.

“Why do you keep her any longer?” sobbed the Princess. “You have done your part; my royal father can’t go back from his word now, and it is so awful to think one might be strangled any moment!”

“Forgive my hasty expression,” said the Prince, “it was quite metaphorical. But in truth I am afraid of offending her, and I implore you to be guarded.”

“ But why can’t you send her home ? ” persisted the Princess.

“ My Chignonette, ” said the Prince mildly, “ I can’t *send* her anywhere ; but I have given orders that she is to be allowed to pass out of the castle-gates whenever she pleases, and I have no doubt she will go soon.”

The Pink Cat, however, had no intention of going, and all the Prince’s hints were thrown away upon her. She made herself perfectly at home in the Castle, and took a grim satisfaction in frightening the old King out of his wits. She took possession of his favourite arm-chair, and even found her way into his bedchamber, and on to his beds, once sending him nearly into fits by getting under the clothes. At meals she presented herself at the royal table, and if she were not immediately served would claw anything she fancied out of the dishes. No one dared interfere with her. The King himself never went beyond “ Poor pussy, pretty pussy, ” at a very respectful distance. Sometimes he would give an order to one of his

attendants, in a grand indifferent sort of way, as if it were the easiest thing in the world to "take the cat away." Nothing came of this, however, but a gentle "Shoo!—Shoo!" from the attendant, of which, of course, the Pink Cat took no notice whatever.

"I should wish," said the old King one day to the Prince, "on the occasion of your betrothal to my daughter, to make some present to your royal mother, and it has occurred to me to offer for her acceptance my very valuable Pink Cat. It will of course be a great sacrifice to me to part with so rare an animal, and one for which I have had such an ardent longing, and concerning which such strangely fulfilled visions have visited me; but on the occasion of a great alliance things should be done handsomely, and I have made up my mind."

The Prince bowed low.

"How does your majesty propose that she should travel?" he asked.

"Well," said the King, "I am quite open to any suggestion on your part. For my own, I had

thought of a hamper—a very large one. I have heard of cats being conveyed in that manner, and it struck me that, as you seem to understand the habits of the creature, perhaps you would kindly assist at the packing."

"It grieves me to thwart your generous impulse," answered the Prince, with a sigh; "but I fear there will be difficulties, insurmountable ones. To begin with, I am convinced that no power on earth could induce the Pink Cat to allow herself to be packed in a hamper, or any other receptacle."

The King sighed too, for he felt that what the Prince had said was true. In fact, all the inhabitants of the castle had discovered that she was anything but an ordinary cat, and lived in terror of their lives. The Princess Chignonette's dislike to her increased daily; and, what was still more distressing to the Prince, he could not get any definite time fixed for his marriage. When he pressed the King to arrange it, all the answer he got was, "Consult the feelings of the Princess." And

when he urged the Princess to fix a day, she only replied, "Let it be as my royal father wishes," a filial sentiment which sorely puzzled the Prince, who began to fear that his Chignonette's affection for him was beginning to cool. His *tête-à-têtes* with her were constantly interrupted by the Pink Cat, whose greatest satisfaction seemed to be in forcing the Prince's attention from his lady-love to herself. Sometimes she would purr and rub herself against him in the most irresistible manner. At other times, she would switch her tail from side to side, and glare at the Princess in a way that filled him with alarm. He was invariably courteous towards her, but on such occasions as these he would fling himself down by her side, and soothe her with caressing words and gestures. The Princess did not like this sort of thing at all."

"I tell you what it is!" she said one day; "I believe that she's a beautiful princess in disguise all the time, and that you know it—there!"

"My Chignonette," answered the Prince meekly, "you wrong me!"

“ Will you swear that you have never seen her anything but a cat *at any time*?—now, be careful !” said the Princess.

“ I will swear !” cried the Prince.

“ Then I’m sorry I spoke,” said the Princess ; but there was no real sorrow in her tone.

A long pause ensued, during which the Prince remained with his face buried in his hands in deep thought.

“ Why can’t you get rid of the creature ?” said the Princess at last. “ Her presence—even the mere consciousness that she is in the castle—takes all joy out of my life ; and it is the only favour I have ever asked of you. All my plans have failed, or I would not trouble you.”

“ What plans ?” asked the Prince anxiously.

“ Globules !” answered the Princess ; “ strychnine, rattlesnake, and arsenic !—I have had them all mixed in turn in her cream ; but she lapped them up, and was none the worse. I think she gets larger and stronger every day.”

The Prince was deeply hurt at the Princess

having taken such a decided step without his knowledge, but he spoke very, very gently :—

“ My Chignonette,” he asked, “ would it not have been better to have consulted me first ? ”

“ What would have been the use,” answered the Princess, “ when I was perfectly certain you would never have consented ? ” A question which the Prince felt a difficulty in answering.

“ The best thing that I can think of,” said he presently, “ is that we should be married at once, and go on a very long wedding tour. In this way you would be freed from the annoyance.”

“ I don’t believe it,” said the Princess. “ She would go with us as sure as fate. I dare say she would ride on your horse, in front of you, the whole way ! ” and the Princess began to cry at the idea. This distressed the Prince infinitely ; besides, he felt a painful conviction that she was right.

“ Of course it might be so,” he answered gloomily ; “ but still, it would be quite worth trying.”

But the Princess Chignonette did not think so at all. She rose from her seat and stood before the Prince, and clasping her beautiful hands together, swore that she would never marry him as long as the Pink Cat remained in the castle !

After this the Prince retired to his own apartments in very low spirits indeed. It did seem hard, after all he had gone through to secure her, that the Pink Cat herself should be the stumbling-block in the way of his happiness. Was it possible to get rid of her ? One impracticable plan after another presented itself to his mind. Should he explain the whole matter to her, and throw himself on her compassion ? But, no ; he knew the disposition of the Queen of the Cats well enough by this time, to be sure that such a confession would have the very opposite effect from what he desired. Then a dark thought crossed his brain, suggested by the Princess's hints, and instantly rejected as unworthy of a prince and a gentleman ; his sense of honour being strengthened by the recollection of the enormous number of lives

he would have to deal with. For many hours he remained in earnest meditation. In imagination he went over his whole acquaintance with the Pink Cat, and all his former difficulties and ultimate success. Gradually his thoughts became confused, and he fell fast asleep, and dreamed a long dream, from which he was roused by a peremptory scratch at the door. He started up, and flew to open it, and the Pink Cat entered as if the room belonged to her, and at once took possession of the couch on which the Prince had been lying, having thrown himself on it in an attitude of utter dejection. He placed himself on a stool by her side, and she submitted to have her chin gently rubbed.

“I have had such a pleasant dream,” said the Prince softly, “of sunny Catland; so fair it seemed, fairer than ever. In imagination I at once sought the rabbit-skin on which your Highness used to lie. There, instead of the exquisite pink form which in my foolish dreaming I expected to find, lay the Lady Scrub, much beautified, and increased in size.” The Pink Cat started, and raised her

ears. "It seemed to me, then," went on the Prince, "as though I questioned those around how this might be, and how it came about that I found Catland so flourishing though Queenless? I was informed that all thanks were due to the Lady Scrub, who had developed wonderful powers of governing, and had quite gained the hearts and confidence of the people; that your prime minister, Lord Grimalkin, considered her his right hand, and it was rumoured was about to make her his wife. My vision was so vivid, that I feel convinced it was a true one, and that if any misgivings have crossed your tender conscience as to the welfare of your kingdom during your absence, they may be set at rest."

Before the Prince had finished this sentence, the Pink Cat had risen to her feet. A turret-window above her was open, and in an instant she had sprung on to the ledge, and with a thrill of horror the Prince saw her disappear. He started up also and strained his neck through the window, just in time to see her alight on the ground far below on

her four feet, and perfectly unhurt. She gave herself a little shake, and set off at full speed across country, clearing every obstacle at a bound, with an ease that seemed more like flying than leaping. The Prince watched the familiar form till it was out of sight, and so subtle are the workings of the human mind, that in the midst of his exultation and triumph he was conscious of a half regretful feeling at the thought that he should never see the beautiful selfish creature again.

“I should like to have bid her good-bye, and begged a morsel of pink fur as a remembrance,” he said to himself, as he hastened to tell the Princess that her wishes were fulfilled.

The tidings that the Pink Cat was gone spread like wildfire over the castle, and caused great rejoicing. An attendant flew to tell the old King.

“You are sure she’s not in my bed all the time?” said he anxiously.

“Certain, your Majesty,” answered the attendant.

“Then,” said the King with dignity, “let

every effort be made to recover her—she is a most valuable animal!” for he was determined to keep up the thing to the end. “I should not, however, wish any of my people to endanger their lives,” he added, “by approaching her too closely, or by irritating her with weapons of offence. Let them set out simply armed with lassos and landing-nets.”

Whether King Kurmugenes’s injunctions were strictly carried out, I can’t say, but certain it is that the Pink Cat was never seen or heard of more. No doubt she reached Catland in perfect safety, and still reigns there in all her glory.

“I’m so pleased,” said the Princess Chignonette, when the Prince had told her the news, “that I don’t mind if we’re married this very evening.”

And so they were, and, for aught I have heard to the contrary, lived happily all the rest of their lives.



THE COWSLIP-BALL.

THE grass and the meadow-flowers stood tall in the fields, and haying-time was drawing near.

“Life is short,” said a Dandelion, addressing his companion flowers. “We are ornamental; the human race love to gaze on us; but they are such a grasping, utilitarian set, that, because they think they can get a little more pecuniary advantage out of us, when we are dead and dried, to work goes the scythe, and down we must go !”

“Down we must go !” echoed the Daisy. “The human race forget all we have done for them in our life-time; it is, however, a satisfaction to remember it oneself.”

“I wonder, now, which of us is of the most importance to mankind ?” said the Buttercup, and it was perfectly evident from the tone in which he spoke that he was satisfied it was himself.

“Perhaps each flower would kindly name his particular line of usefulness,” said the Daisy, “and then we shall be able to judge—the Buttercup, for instance ?”

“I have a great gift,” said the Buttercup, modestly. “If I am held up to the cheek of a little child it is at once apparent whether he has a predilection for butter or not. If such is the case, I cast a yellow glow on his face ; if not, I make no sign.”

“Hum !” said the Dandelion ; “is that so *very* useful ?”

“Eminently so,” answered the Buttercup. “Let us imagine a case. Suppose the farmer yonder misses a pound of butter from his dairy, he has only to summon all the children of the village about him, and hold one of us up to their faces in

turn, and it would be at once apparent who was the guilty party."

"I doubt if that would go down in a court of law," said the Dandelion, quickly.

"Possibly not," replied the Buttercup; "but we are not all lawyers!"

This remark seemed unanswerable, though the Dandelion felt sure there was a weak point in it somewhere; so he began to talk about himself.

"I am of a curious, mechanical turn of mind," said he, "which I endeavour to use for the benefit of mankind. When my yellow petals fall off, there comes in their place a ball of white fluff, which acts as a clock. School-children have only to blow on it, counting each puff, to find out what the time is. Thus, you see, they never need be late for school, if they happened to find one of us on the way."

"That depends upon whether you keep the same time as the school clock," said the Buttercup; and the Dandelion felt that his yellow friend was

too much for him ; so he changed the conversation again.

“What can you do, Daisy ?” he asked.

“Mine is a very important mission,” said the Daisy. “I am gifted with a wonderful spirit of divination in affairs of the heart. Suppose a young girl wishes to find out if her lover be faithful to her ? She consults me. Not only in England, but in all parts of the world, I am looked upon as an oracle. In France, in Germany, in Italy, in Australia even, where everything goes by the rule of contrary, and my petals are lilac instead of white. One by one young lovers of all countries pluck them off, murmuring words in their own language ; and whatever sentence lingers on their lips as the last petal falls, they know to be the truth.”

The Daisy paused and looked up, to see what effect her statement had made. The Buttercup and Dandelion were evidently impressed, for they made not a single remark on the subject.

“Now, Cowslip,” said the Dandelion, “hold up your head, and tell us what you can do.”

Now, this was not kind in the Dandelion, for he knew perfectly well that the Cowslip was incapable of holding up her head.

“Alas!” said she, “I am a very ignorant creature. I can tell no one, least of all the human race, anything that they did not know before; but little children like to play with me, and sometimes make me into pale yellow tea.”

“Ha, ha, ha!” laughed the Daisy, and the Buttercup, and the Dandelion: “what a gifted creature the Cowslip is! She can make pale yellow tea!”

When the Cowslip heard this scornful laugh she drooped her head lower and lower, and large tears fell from her yellow eyes on to the grass beneath, and the blades whispered—

“How salt the dew tastes this morning!”

In the old manor-house near there lay a little

child ill with a fever; she moaned and tossed on her bed, while her mother sat beside her.

“Shall I read to you, my child?” said the mother.

“No, thank you, mother. I want to go out and help Jenny at the farm feed the chickens.”

“But you are too ill, my darling.”

“Then ask Jenny to come and see me. I want her. She’ll tell me about the things outside.”

“Your uncle, the professor, is coming to see you,” said the mother; “and he’s so clever; he’ll tell you such wonderful stories. You’ll like that, won’t you, dear?”

“No, thank you, mother dear. I don’t like clever people when I’m ill. I want Jenny.”

Meanwhile a young girl from the farmhouse was hurrying through the meadow in search of flowers. She passed by the daisies and the buttercups, and the dandelions, and chose out all the cowslips—our little friend among them. Her heart bounded as she found herself chosen,

and she bid farewell to the spot of grass which her tears had made greener than all the rest of the field. The young girl sat down under a tree, and strung all the cowslips together into a large ball, so fresh and fragrant, and with it she made her way to the old manor-house, and begged admittance to the sick child's room.

“And right glad to see you Miss Nellie 'll be,” said the housekeeper; “she's been asking for you all this morning.”

So Jenny and the cowslip-ball visited the darkened room. The child raised herself in bed.

“Oh ! Jenny, I am so glad it's you,” she cried; “and what a delicious cowslip-ball !” The small feverish hands clasped the fragrant treasure, and Jenny sat down by the child, and soothed her with her simple country talk.

When Jenny left the room, the mother whispered—

“Your visit has done my child good; she has taken more notice of that cowslip-ball than of all the fine books and toys I have got for her.”

Jenny's eyes brightened as she made her curtsey.

"I had nothing else to bring the dear little lady, ma'am," she said.

"Mamma," said the child when Jenny was gone, "isn't it a sweet ball? When I press it against my face I could fancy I was out in the meadows."

The heart of our little friend the Cowslip was filled with thankfulness when she heard these words.

"Then I am really of some use after all," she thought.

Little Nellie was never to play in the fields any more. The next day the fever left her, but so weak and tired that she sank quietly into a long, sweet sleep. Rare hot-house flowers were scattered over her by loving hands; but no one liked to remove the withered cowslip-ball, which lay on the bed beside her; so it was placed in the little coffin and buried with her.

THE NEGLECTED TOAD.

HE was very, very ugly ; his coat was mud-colour, his form ungainly, and his mouth frightful. He knew he was ugly, and the fact preyed on his mind night and day ; but he could not help it ; do what he would, long as he might, he could not improve his figure, or his complexion, or his features, one iota.

Some people said, that inside his ugly little head there was something bright and beautiful and dazzling. That might or might not be the case, our poor little Toad did not trouble himself about it. If it was there, what was the use of it ? what pleasure did it give to himself or any one else ? Everybody disliked and avoided him on account of his ugliness ; even little children, who petted his

cousins the frogs, would not touch him on any consideration, and sometimes they teased him, and threw stones at him.

Once a village schoolboy gave him a kick which lamed him for a long time, saying, "I'll larn ye to be a To-ad."

The poor Toad did not resent the unkindness; he only limped away, saying to himself, "Ah! that's all very well, and very natural; but what I want to know is, how *not* to be a Toad. If any one would teach me that, I would bless him indeed!"

Then he gazed at his own reflection in a puddle long and earnestly. "Yes," he thought, "I am perfectly hideous; no wonder the schoolboy gave me a kick, who could resist it? I look as if I were made to be kicked!"

On one occasion it happened that he was strolling along a lane where a very little child was playing. She crept softly towards him, and pointed to him, saying, "Pretty! pretty!" The Toad's heart gave a grateful throb of joy, and he

tried to throw a kind and pleasing expression into his eyes as he looked up at the little one ; but just then the child's big sister, who had charge of her, came up, and seizing her by the hand pulled her away, exclaiming, "Don't go near the nasty thing, it'll spit at you, and kill you !" and the child began to scream and cry as she was borne off.

This little incident affected the poor Toad even more than the kick.

"Why, I would not hurt any one if I could," he thought ; "and I could not if I would ! I know I am ugly, but that is no reason I should be venomous. I wish I could go back to the days of my childhood, when I lived in the pond, and never troubled myself about how I looked, or what was thought of me. I used to think then what a fine thing it would be to be able to walk as well as to swim, and to associate with human beings ; but it's nothing but disappointment, after all !" And he shuffled disconsolately back to the garden where he lived.

One summer's day, as he was taking a solitary,

aimless walk along a gravel path in the shrubbery, his attention was suddenly attracted by an object which fairly dazzled his eyes by its brilliancy, and a large peacock Butterfly settled on a carnation close to him.

“Most radiant, exquisite, and unmatchable beauty!” exclaimed the Toad, unconsciously quoting from Shakspere. “What would I give to be like you!”

“You are really too polite,” said the Butterfly, turning herself a little round, so as to show her wings to more advantage.

“How delightful it must be,” went on the Toad, “to create admiration wherever one goes!”

“Well,” answered the Butterfly, rather superciliously, “one gets a little tired of the sort of thing. Every child that sees me wants to catch me.”

“Ah!” said the Toad mournfully, “no one will ever want to catch me!”

“Really?” said the Butterfly, affecting a well-bred air of surprise. “But you are joking, perhaps?”

“I never was more in earnest in my life,” answered the Toad, and he crawled a step nearer the Butterfly, and looked her straight in the face.

The Butterfly recoiled a little. “Well, to be sure,” she said, “you are rather plain; but, after all, it doesn’t signify!”

“Of course it doesn’t signify to you,” replied the Toad; “but to me it signifies very much, very much indeed!”

The Butterfly opened and shut her wings gently in the sunshine, and considered a moment. At last she said—

“You know we can’t all be beautiful!”

“No,” said the Toad dreamily. “I suppose we can’t all be beautiful. But why should you be beautiful and not I?”

The Butterfly was incapable of following the Toad’s train of thought. To her her own beauty seemed a natural right, and she was inclined to take his remark as a personal affront to herself.

“Well, I’m sure,” she began, and then she couldn’t think of anything else to say, and buried

her trunk in the calyx of the carnation, though there was no honey there, to hide her embarrassment.

“I dare say it’s all right,” went on the Toad, “only I don’t understand it.”

“I don’t see that there is anything to understand,” said the Butterfly, forgetting her breeding in her excitement; “it’s simple enough. I am beautiful because my wings have exquisitely-painted peacock’s eyes on them, and you are ugly—I mean ordinary—because your coat is so dingy, and your mouth so wide.”

“I know that,” said the Toad. “That is not what I mean at all. What I want to know is, why is this thus?”

“Well, I must be off,” said the Butterfly, who felt that the conversation was getting beyond her; “I have so many engagements. The honeysuckles are expecting me every minute, and I know the tiger-lily feels hurt because it is so long since I visited her. I promised to look up the lavender-bed, too, if I had time.”

“Before you go,” said the Toad hesitatingly, “might I venture to ask a great favour of you?”

“Name it,” said the Butterfly graciously.

“You are mistress of the art of fascination. Will you give me a hint how to make myself a little less uncouth—a little more attractive?”

“I can show you how one should poise one’s self, if you like,” answered the Butterfly, hovering daintily over the carnation.

“It is a most elegant performance,” said the Toad admiringly; “but, you see, it would be quite useless for me to attempt that sort of thing.”

“If you wish to pay a hurried visit, and yet be gracious and graceful,” continued the Butterfly, “I think it should be done in this kind of way;” and she darted rapidly to a neighbouring lily, just kissed her pure white petals, and returned.

“Beautiful!” exclaimed the Toad enthusiastically; “but ask yourself, supposing even I were able to accomplish such a manœuvre, how would it suit my figure?”

“Then,” went on the Butterfly, pursuing her

own train of ideas, "when you want to alight, this is the prettiest way ;" and she fluttered airily down again on to the carnation's crimson cushion.

"That, alas ! would be equally impossible," said the Toad in a voice of deep disappointment, for he began to suspect that the Butterfly was more intent on showing off her own accomplishments than in helping him.

"I am afraid I have nothing more to suggest," said the Butterfly. "The honeysuckles will be in despair, and I never expose my wings to the evening dew. The sun shines as long as he can to accommodate me ; but one does not like to be *exigeante*."

Away she flew, darting hither and thither in the sunlight, greeting now one sweet flower and now another, brilliant and beautiful, welcome everywhere. The Toad meanwhile crawled drearily along the gravel-walk. He was but a young toad, and life seemed very long and uninteresting to him at that moment.

For some days after this little interview he

wandered listlessly about the garden, occasionally catching a glimpse of the beautiful Butterfly as she flitted about, and looking after her with longing eyes; but she was too preoccupied to notice him with even a passing salutation. As time went on, however, he began to crave less for notice and admiration; he occupied himself with his own thoughts, and lived chiefly under a plank in the tool-house. Day after day he grew more accustomed to his life of solitude and satisfied with his own resources. His neighbours laughed at him for what they called his "old bachelor ways;" some of which were certainly rather peculiar. For instance, the order and regularity of his habits and his love of tidiness increased to such an extent that when the time came for exchanging his old coat for a new one, he rolled it carefully into a small ball and swallowed it out of the way. He cared less and less for the opinion of the outside world, and became gradually quite contented with his lot.

The bright summer days sped away, and the

flowers in the garden grew scarce. The green leaves on the trees turned scarlet and golden, then dropped from the branches, and rustled and danced over the lawn till they were swept away by the gardener. Then the snow fell thick and fast, till lawn, and flower-beds, and gravel-walks all looked alike in their smooth white covering. How cold it was ! The Toad lay snug under his plank in the tool-house, and congratulated himself.

One day he had ventured forth from his hiding-place for a moment to take a glimpse at the white world without between the cracks in the wall, when his attention was arrested by a melancholy little voice close to him saying, “Oh dear ! oh dear !” He looked up, and saw in a dark corner of the tool-house what he would have taken for the form of a dusky-looking moth, but that the tone of the voice enabled him to recognise the object of his admiration and envy in days gone by—the peacock Butterfly !

“Good gracious !” exclaimed the Toad, “what on earth brings you here ?” He did not mean

to be discourteous, but living alone under a plank in the tool-house does not improve one's manners.

"I have been here for a long time," answered the Butterfly. "I was forced to seek for shelter, for every flower in the garden, and even the sun himself, has deserted me. I managed to find my way into this gloomy place, and, ah me ! it is so deadly dull !"

"I don't find it dull," said the Toad. "I am very happy here."

"Ah ! very likely," said the Butterfly. "You are used to it, and you have not been accustomed to sunshine and admiration all your life, as I have."

"True," replied the Toad.

"But what depresses me most of all," went on his companion, "is a growing conviction which I cannot shake off, that I am not the Butterfly I was. I feel so stiff and disinclined to move, and that must destroy grace—don't you think so ?"

"I never was graceful myself," said the Toad. "I don't know anything about it."

"Then," went on the Butterfly, "a horrid thought has come into my mind—that the peacock's eyes on my wings are not so brilliant as they used to be. Dear old Toad! I beg you to tell me if this is really the case, or merely a morbid fancy."

"Come into the light," said the Toad, "and I'll tell you."

The Butterfly crawled languidly out of her corner, and stood trembling with anxiety, waiting for the Toad's verdict. "Don't deceive me," she said.

Presently the Toad spoke, but very reluctantly, for he had a kind heart.

"I am sorry to say," he said, "that I consider your wings are decidedly faded."

The Butterfly moved sulkily away. One does not always like to hear the truth, even when one has begged for it.

The Toad retreated to his snugger, and pondered. "After all," he thought, "I believe I have the best of it. One cannot miss what one

has never enjoyed ; and if one has no wings with peacock's eyes on them, one is not afraid of their fading."

For the Toad, you see, had become a philosopher.

THE SWANS.

SEPTEMBER sunshine shone in St. James's Park. It played on the blue and gold in the tower of the Houses of Parliament, and on the sheet of Ornamental Water, tingeing each ripple with light, and glancing on the oars which dipped in and out as the little boats hurried past. There was a soft mist over the trees and the big buildings, and through the distant hum of the great city came now and again the sweet chime of the Westminster bells. London was said to be quite empty, but yet there were people enough left in it to enjoy St. James's Park ; some rowing about on the water, and some strolling along the banks, while some amused themselves by leaning over the bridge and feeding the water-fowl. The great white

swans glided about, and cast grey shadows in the water almost as distinct in their outline as themselves. No wonder the young lady swans were never tired of looking at their own reflections. The principal swan among them pushed himself proudly along, in a defiant sort of manner. He was a very great personage indeed—all St. James's Park belonged to him, or at least he fancied that it did, which comes to the same thing. He was called “The Admiral,” and ruled the whole little fleet which sailed on the Ornamental Water. The many-coloured ducks owned his sway, and scuttled cringingly out of the way whenever he and his shining retinue approached.

On this September afternoon, to the astonishment of all the swans, there suddenly appeared a stranger among them, tall and slender, with a form much akin to their own, but coal-black, and with a bill of a brilliant carmine hue.

“And pray who are you?” asked the Admiral. The stranger made a graceful obeisance as he replied simply—

“ I am a Black Swan.”

“ Black you certainly are,” answered the principal lady swan, “ but *swan* never. There is no such thing as a Black Swan.”

The Admiral put her remark aside with a quiet dignity.

“ It is of no sort of consequence,” he said, “ whether he be a swan or not. In either case his appearance amongst us is equally uncalled for. Indeed, if he really be a swan, his conduct is even less excusable, as his extraordinary complexion will reflect discredit upon us all. Sir, I have the honour to wish you a very good evening. You will be obliging enough to return at once to the country from which you came.”

“ Alas ! ” replied the Black Swan, “ gladly would I return to my native country. I did not come of my own free-will, but I was captured and brought here, and they have cut my wings so that I cannot fly ! ”

“ And pray where is your country ? ” asked the Admiral.

“Far away, on the other side of the world,” replied the Black Swan; “we are all black there, and yet we are considered beautiful.”

“All black!” exclaimed the Admiral and the lady swans; “why what a benighted country it must be!”

“It is not a benighted country,” cried the Black Swan; “the sun shines brighter than it does here, ay, and the moon too; and it is so large and free, one can stretch one’s wings and fly away and away for ever! Here it is so small, one feels cramped.”

“Pooh!” exclaimed the Admiral; “look at Buckingham Palace!”

“What is Buckingham Palace to me?” asked the Black Swan; “give me great tracts of country, free to all.”

“Look at this magnificent sheet of water,” continued the Admiral; “perhaps you are not aware that it all comes from an artesian well, made on purpose to supply me.”

“The river, on the banks of which I was born,” said the Black Swan, “is so wide that you cannot

see the other side, and sometimes the floods rise so high that one swims over the tops of the trees. Oh ! it is so glorious ! ” and the Black Swan raised himself a little out of the water, and stretched his wings as if he would fain fly away across the world to his old home.

“ This is insufferable,” exclaimed the Admiral ; “ not content with comparing your savage country with the very centre of all that is civilised and splendid, you tell me fairy-tales which the youngest cygnet amongst us would have too much sense to believe.”

“ Do not speak so harshly,” said the Black Swan, “ I tell you nothing but truth ! See, I am the same flesh and blood as yourself ; I am a stranger among you, and I feel so lonely ! In my country we welcome strangers.”

“ Don’t attempt to argue with me,” said the Admiral, “ or it may be the worse for you. I suppose you must remain here till your wings are grown again, and till then I advise you, for your own sake, to give us a pretty wide berth.” And

he flounced round, fluffing up all his soft white feathers, and jerked himself along through the water, followed by all the lady swans, imitating him as well as they could.

The park Constable and the Gamekeeper stood on the bridge, watching the introduction of the newly-imported Black Swan with some anxiety.

“They seem to take as kindly to one another as one could expect,” said the Constable.

“Hum,” said the Gamekeeper, “I don’t much like the looks of the old one, but there’s nothing for it but to leave them alone.”

The poor Black Swan had a sorry time of it. He had grieved sorely at leaving his native land and his old friends, and finding himself in a strange uncongenial climate, but he had at least looked for a kindly welcome from his kindred when he presented himself among them, though their plumes were white and his were black. *Alas!* he found himself scorned and avoided by all. The Admiral never appeared to be conscious of his presence on the water, and the young lady swans

drew aside as they passed him as if afraid that his touch might soil their white feathers. Even the ducks thought it necessary to imitate the example of their superiors, and made sneering remarks whenever they caught sight of him, and the pert little ducklings called out—

“Why don’t you wash yourself, Blackey? there’s plenty of water!”

One fair young swan, just emerging from cygnethood, pitied him, and longed to comfort him, but dared not, on account of the Admiral’s displeasure, as he had strictly forbidden any intercourse. She watched her opportunity, however, and one evening, when the Admiral was engaged in a sort of condescending conversation with a Muscovy drake, she made her way to the unfrequented part of the water where the Black Swan swam, sad and sorrowful. It was a dull foggy night, with just a touch of frost in the air, which made the Black Swan, accustomed to warmer climes, shiver. The fair young swan glided softly up to him. She was snow white, and he was as

black as possible, but their shadows looked much the same in the water.

“I am *so* sorry for you,” she whispered. “Tell me about your country and the great floods, and how you swam over the tops of the trees; I believe it all!”

The poor Black Swan thanked her with tears in his eyes, and then he told her all he could think of about his country and his own big river.

“One can fly miles and miles, and never come to the end of it,” said he. “All along the banks it looks lovely, for the trees are so thickly covered with creepers that there are green bowers everywhere. There the beautiful birds live; not black, nor white either, but of all the tints one sees in the skies!” Then he told of the great blue water-lilies that float on the surface on the water, and of the strange bird-beasts who dive about, with bills like swans and fur coats on their backs. Last he described long night-flights with his companions, when the moon shone as clear as day, and the river looked as if it were made of silver. The young

English swan listened with breathless interest, and both she and her companion became so absorbed in their conversation, that they did not notice the stealthy approach of a dusky form. Suddenly, however, a harsh voice exclaimed—

“ Insolent wretch ! How dare you speak to one of my women-kind ? You shall die for this ! ”

The young swan fled affrighted, and in another moment the Admiral had flown upon the Black Swan, and there ensued a long and deadly struggle. The Admiral was the most powerfully built of the two. The Black Swan’s frame was slighter, and pining in an uncongenial climate had already told on his constitution ; but he fought well and bravely, and it is doubtful if he might not have been victorious after all, had not a shrill cry from the Admiral brought some other swans to his assistance, amongst whom the poor Black Swan had no chance. The contest was soon decided now, and they left him alone to die. He had just strength remaining to crawl on to the island, where he sank down under a weeping birch-tree.

The kind moon rose high above the tower, and looked tenderly down at the dying swan. As he lay there, weak and dizzy, with the life-blood fast ebbing, he forgot that he was in a strange, unfriendly land. He was conscious only of the moonlight, and fancied himself once more on the banks of the great river where he first saw the light, far away on the other side of the world. Some people going home late that night through the Birdcage Walk, fancied that they heard a strain of sad but wonderfully sweet music from inside the Park ; but the gates were fast locked, and they came to the conclusion that it must have been imagination.

The body of the poor Black Swan was found stiff and cold on the island the next morning by the Gamekeeper, who felt very indignant with the white swans. It was some consolation, however, to be able to tell the park Constable that he had felt sure it would end so from the beginning. He had seen it in the old one's eye.

The fair young swan sorrowed long and deeply, but she had to keep her griefs to herself and

sympathize about the Admiral's wounds, which were not long in healing.

Some months after, the Acclimatization Society in New South Wales sent to England for some white swans, and it was decided that the Admiral should go, accompanied by two lady-wives.

"For he is such a tartar, we shall be well rid of him," said the Gamekeeper.

The Admiral was pleased with the idea on the whole. Great person as he was in St. James's Park, what would he not be in that benighted country, where there were no white swans ! How he would astonish the natives ! This prospect supported him under the indignity of having his wings clipt, and kept up his spirits during all the inconveniences and miseries of the long sea voyage.

The lady-swans were not so easily reconciled. They suffered much from their cramped quarters on board ship and the scanty attendance bestowed on them, as well as from the lack of their native

element. They complained ceaselessly, and neglected their personal appearance to such a degree, that you would hardly have recognised in their dirty draggletailed forms, the fair white beauties of St. James's Park. Before they had rounded the Cape of Good Hope, one of them succumbed entirely under her privations. The Admiral felt her loss a good deal at the time, but being of a philosophical turn of mind, he consoled himself with the reflection that one wife was better than no wives at all.

“You will be a great queen, my dear, in this benighted country,” he said, as they approached the Australian shores. “Take care to conduct yourself accordingly, and be sure to imitate my behaviour in every particular.”

When the ship anchored in Port Jackson, the white swans were conveyed at once to the Botanical Gardens in Sydney, and were there set free to wander at their own sweet will. And behold ! it was not a benighted country at all ! The Admiral was forced to acknowledge to himself

that it was nearly as beautiful as St. James's Park. For there lay the glorious blue Harbour with its white-sanded bays and fair islands, all standing out in the clear atmosphere, so distinct, that they seemed close at hand. In the garden grew beautiful trees and shrubs from all parts of the world, with sweet northern flowers amongst the rich foliage of the tropics. Graceful bamboos, their tall slight stems creaking like the masts of a ship, as they swayed gently to and fro in the breeze. Broad-leaved bananas and weeping willows, plumpy tree-ferns and sweet roses and carnations. Bushes of heliotrope and scarlet geranium, and groves of camellias, their fallen blossoms carpeting the ground, while the air was laden with the scent of the datura and the magnolia. Even some gentle English wild flowers were to be found there, tenderly nurtured and cared for, though their colours might look faded and their forms insignificant amongst so much luxuriance.

On a sunny sheet of water in the midst were

many varieties of wild-fowl, almost as brilliant in their colouring as the flowers themselves. The Admiral felt as if he must be in a dream, as he stepped majestically into it, but one plunge and shake in the fresh familiar element, brought all his own identity and consequence about him again, and he swam as if the whole place belonged to him. The lady-swan imitated his every movement, and felt like a great queen.

“Now, my dear,” said her spouse, “let us lose no time in arranging our plumage; I would not be caught in this state of déshabille by the inferior race we are about to enlighten for anything in the world!” Such a splashing and dashing and pluming ensued as soon restored the pristine splendour of our noble friends, and by the time a party of black swans came in sight they were quite ready to receive them in a regal manner. The Australian swans approached with a pleasant hearty greeting, and nothing could exceed the dignity and condescension with which the Admiral and his lady responded; but their black friends

did not seem at all impressed. "Pray make yourselves at home," said their leader, "the place is quite big enough for all! I dare say you will feel a little uncomfortable at first in your funny white coats; it is not pleasant to be conspicuous, of course, but we are an easy-going race, and this is the land of liberty."

During this address the white swans remained perfectly speechless with indignation. The Black Swan thought they were shy and uncomfortable.

"Pray don't distress yourselves," continued he. "Perhaps exposure to our sun may have a good effect on your feathers. I shall be happy to show the lady round the gardens at any time."

"My lady-wife," said the Admiral haughtily, "never leaves my side."

"As you please," replied the Black Swan carelessly. "If you want any assistance I shall be happy to render it."

So the white swans swam about in dignified seclusion. Little children playing in the gardens threw bread to the black swans and tried to entice

the strangers to partake also, but they moved majestically off in the opposite direction.

It was rather dull work for the Admiral, for his wife, being a mere shadow and echo of himself, was not much of a companion. However, he was gratified to see her fully entering into the grandeur of her position, and asserting herself more and more. Indeed it was quite a novel situation for my lady swan, who had been only one amongst many on the other side of the world; and she rapidly gained confidence in herself and her own judgment. The Australian swans never passed the new-comers without a friendly salutation, and after a while the Admiral would fain have entered into a patronizing conversation with some of them, but his wife kept him up to the mark.

“Once meet them on what they will fancy terms of equality,” said she, “and one cannot tell what it may lead to. As they do not know their proper place, our only safe course is to keep ourselves to ourselves.”

The Australian swans were too much occupied

with their own affairs to feel hurt or take offence at the exclusiveness of the strangers. It was spring-time, and the black-plumed ladies were very busy preparing their high nests. The Admiral's wife, after much lamenting at the idea of introducing a dainty young family where they would be so little appreciated, and declaring that it was quite impossible to find sticks and rushes suitable to the purpose, followed their example. The Admiral kept a jealous guard over her, his feathers fluffed out to such an extent that he looked double his ordinary size. He might have spared himself the exertion, for the black husbands were too busy attending to their own wives to think of intruding. By-and-by the big eggs began to crack, and out came two young cygnets.

“Poor things!” sighed the lady-mother. “They little know what an uncivilized land they have the misfortune to be born in.”

“What’s the use of grumbling?” said the Admiral. “We must make the best of it, and bring them up to know their proper position.”

Little black cygnets came into the world, too, and their down really did not look much darker than that of the English swan's children; but the Admiral's wife declared that it gave her a turn whenever she caught sight of them.

The white cygnets were brought up to know their proper position: that is to say, they were kept strictly apart from their little black neighbours, and never allowed to leave the portion of water which their parents had taken possession of. One day, however, the eldest was missing.

“Where is your brother?” asked the lady-mother of little Miss Swan.

“I am afraid,” said she, demurely, “that, in spite of all I could say to dissuade him, he is conversing with those young Swans you desired us to have nothing to do with. But comfort yourself, dear mother: you have still a daughter to whom your lightest word is law, and who is not above profiting by the advice and experience of her parents.”

But the mother would not take comfort.

“The unprincipled child!” she exclaimed. “Who knows what this may lead to? I dare not tell your father!”

Just then her first-born appeared.

“Mother, mother!” he cried, “forgive me! They are such jolly little fellows, and they say they are so sorry for us!”

“What impertinence!” exclaimed the lady-swan. “What business have they to pity you, I should like to know? and what for?”

“Because,” said Master Swan, “they say we shall grow up, not a proper black colour, but snow-white, like you and father, and that we shall never have red bills.”

“Ignorant child!” said the mother. “Don’t you know that white is the only proper colour for a swan, and that red bills are the height of vulgarity?”

“Oh! no, mother, dear; all are black except us; but I don’t mind! I would not wish to be any better than my own father and mother. Would you, sister?”

“What nonsense!” said she, indignantly. “I should like to know what right they have to suppose we shall not grow up black! I expect to be as black as the best of them when I am full-fledged, and a good deal blacker, too; and I shall have a bill as red as a camellia!”

The mother’s down fairly stood on end with horror at this conversation.

“Oh! you foolish children!” she cried, “how shall I ever make you understand? Here comes your father,” and she repeated to him what the cygnets had said.

“Poor children!” said he, more gently than was his wont; “this is what comes of being born in an uncivilized land. Possibly I may have erred in thinking white plumage equally necessary in all parts of the world. Mind, I only say *possibly*.”

The young cygnets went off to play together, and the parents remained in earnest conversation.

“I begin to think, my dear,” said the Admiral, “that as our lots have been cast in this country,

we may as well allow things to take their natural course, and not try to prevent all intercourse between the young people. The fact is, you see, that we are all swans. What do you say?"

"Say!" echoed his wife indignantly; "why I say that you are not half the swan you were to talk in this sort of way. How can you dream of our lowering ourselves in such a manner? It is not so very long ago since you thought very differently. Have you forgotten the island on the Ornamental Water, and the lifeless corpse that lay there?"

"Wife," said the Admiral, "I have not forgotten; but there are some things that perhaps it were best if one could forget."

"Have you forgotten the poor young swan who pined, and some say died of a broken heart, all from the effects of a savage scene she had witnessed?"

"I have not forgotten that either," said the Admiral.

"It was only a few moments' conversation after

all, and you thought then that two young lives were scarce atonement enough for it. You are indeed changed, and I blush for you."

"Perhaps I am changed!" said the father-swan, and such a mournful look came on his stern face as would have touched most wives, but the lady-swan only became more provoked.

"You should think of *my* dignity," she said, "if not of your own. You promised me when I came here, that I should be a great queen. I should like to know what I am queen over; not even my own children, it seems."

"My dear," said her husband, "you are queen over me!"

This mollified the lady for the moment; but the conversation was the forerunner of many others equally warm on her part. As time went on, it seemed as if the position of the Admiral and his wife were gradually reversing; he gave up his overbearing ways, and became the meekest of husbands. As his character softened, hers became harder, and the more he was inclined to relinquish

his old opinions, the more she stuck to them, and was never tired of cramming them down his long throat. He bore it very patiently, acknowledging to himself that all her principles had been instilled into her by him, and that he had no one else to thank. The older the lady grew, the worse became her temper, and the more wearisome in consequence her companionship, and the Admiral began to long more than ever for an interchange of thought with his neighbours ; but it seemed too late to break the ice of reserve now, even if his wife would have permitted the attempt. The young swans meantime were fast growing up, and becoming very independent in their ways ; and the mother was at last obliged to give up the point of preventing all intercourse between them and their black contemporaries, and contented herself with forbidding their names to be mentioned in her presence. The acquaintance, therefore, between her son and the little Australian swans soon ripened into an intimacy. He liked their pleasant manners and free talk, and found it a delightful change from

his mother's ill-humour and his father's depression. Little Miss Swan held aloof for some time, and gave herself a good many airs. She was quite determined to be as black as any of them, and looked anxiously every day at her own reflection in the water for the expected transformation. Alas ! she gradually developed into as fair and white a young swan as is to be seen on the river Thames. Her lamentations were unceasing, and exasperated her mother beyond everything.

“ Oh mother ! ” she would cry, “ if I only had one black feather I shouldn't mind so much ; and to think that my bill will never be red so long as I live ! I know that all those young swans will always look upon me with contempt, though they may be too good-natured to say so. As for you and father, you are old, and it doesn't much matter how you look, or what is thought of you ; but I never imagined I should grow up the same.”

“ I scarcely know which shocks me most,” the mother would reply ; “ your intense ignorance, or your utter heartlessness.” And then she would

flounce round, and leave her daughter to herself. The Admiral listened to these complaints with more patience, but he too felt wounded by the way in which his daughter regarded the personal peculiarities (for such he had almost begun to consider them) of her own father and mother. Convinced that she could never be the equal of the Black Swan family in external advantages, Miss Swan ceased to hold her head so high. She condescended to accompany her brother on his visits to the neighbours round, and their genial ways gradually won even her cold heart. The Admiral took a great interest in these visits, and when his wife was out of the way would often question his son and daughter about the conversation they had heard on such occasions, and the domestic arrangements of the black-plumed families.

One beautiful spring morning the Father Swan and his children held a long and very earnest consultation, just out of earshot of Mrs. Swan.

“What on earth are you all whispering about?”

said she at last, thoroughly provoked and very curious. "Can't you speak out?"

Then the other three looked at one another, and the father said in a low tone—

"Better break it to her at once."

"You tell her then," said Master Swan.

"No, no," said the Admiral hastily, "I can't undertake that; but I promise to do my best for you when the truth is out."

Then spoke Master Swan. "Mother dear, I am afraid it will be a great shock to you, but I can't keep the secret any longer. The fact is, that I have offered my heart and hand to the eldest daughter of our nearest neighbours, and am fortunate enough to have been accepted. My father has been kind enough to give his consent——"

"Well, not exactly," put in the Admiral, quickly.

"Anything more?" said Mother Swan, and the expression in her eye made her husband quail.

“And I,” said Miss Swan, “am engaged to be married to the eldest son.”

On this the mother rose a few inches out of the water, and gave a cry so shrill and piercing that it was heard right across the Harbour, and the man in the lighthouse on the Heads wondered what it could be.

“Now, my dear,” said the Admiral, “don’t take on so. Let me splash some water over you.”

The Lady Swan collected herself, and settling on the water again, said very slowly and impressively—

“If this is really the case, I shall drown myself.”

“Very well, my dear,” said her husband quietly.

“*Very well!*” repeated Mrs. Swan; “what do you mean?”

“I beg your pardon, my dear,” said the Admiral; “I only meant that I am afraid you’ll have to put up with it.”

Mrs. Swan had no real intention of drowning

herself, and it ended by her “putting up with it.” For a whole year she never acknowledged her son and daughter-in-law, occupying herself with another nest, and another young family, but when the spring came round again, the young cygnets, some white, some black, and some parti-coloured, splashed merrily together. As time went on Mother Swan’s sympathies enlarged a little. She could not refuse to associate with her own grandchildren, and contented herself by showing special favours to the least black among them, and describing the glories of the land they had never seen, where there were none but white-plumed swans. The young ones were never tired of hearing about what they considered such a very funny country, but the Admiral always looked grave and sad when it was talked about. Either recollections of the past or his wife’s tyranny aged him prematurely, and he died before the birth of his great-great-grandchildren. Years passed away, and there were more intermarriages between the young Swans, each generation showing

less trace of the English blood in their veins. Mother Swan lived to be very old indeed, and watched the gradual extinction of her tribe with ever-increasing dismay. It was the general belief that extreme age and an evil temper had turned her own plumes white, and her stories of a country where there was a race of White Swans came to be regarded in the light of fairy-tales.

On one occasion she went to inspect a newly-fledged family of grand-children in the eighth degree, who lived in a distant part of the garden, in the hope of discovering some trace of their English descent amongst them. What was her horror to find a small tuft of white feathers, which had appeared in the wing of the youngest, being carefully removed by the bill of an anxious parent who regarded it as a deformity ! This shock to her nerves was the cause of her death.



THE GIFTED FROG.

IT was such a pretty pool. Every sort of water-plant grew there, from the tall purple loose-strife and crimson willow-weed, to the creeping money-wort, with its golden blossoms. The great white water-lilies liked to lay their sleepy heads on its calm, clear surface, and forget-me-nots nestled along its banks. In the evening the May-flies could not resist the pleasure of dancing there, though they knew it might be a dance of death, for were there not numerous pink-spotted trout watching for them below, and ready to dart on them at a moment's notice ?

One evening at sunset a lively little trout was employing himself in this way with great success, when he observed an intelligent-looking frog sitting

on the bank, half in the water and half out, and croaking.

“Why don’t you come right in?” called the Trout. “You can’t think how lovely it is. And the May-flies are just in perfection; come along !”

“No, thank you,” said the Frog; “I’d rather not.”

“Perhaps you can’t swim?” suggested the Trout apologetically.

“Can’t I though !” answered the Frog. “Let me tell you, that when human beings try to swim, it’s me they imitate, not you !”

“I should think not,” said the Trout; “why the poor things haven’t got any fins! Well, come along, Froggie, and let’s see how you perform.”

“No, thank you,” said the Frog again, “I had enough of the pond when I was a young thing, with a large head. I am too old to make such exertions now.”

“Too old! too lazy, you mean.”

“That’s rude,” said the Frog.

The Trout darted upwards, and caught a fine May-fly; then dived, and presently appeared again, saying in a conciliatory tone—

“Aren’t you hungry, old fellow?”

“Very,” answered the frog.

“Don’t you like May-flies?”

“Rather! Don’t you see I keep opening my mouth in hopes one will fly in by mistake?”

“I should say you might wait long enough,” said the Trout, “though your mouth is pretty wide;” and with that he disappeared.

Early the next morning, before the dew was off the ground, a Sparrow in search of worms observed the Frog sitting in the same spot.

“Why don’t you come right out, and look for your breakfast, Froggie?” said she.

“Much too early to bestir oneself,” answered the Frog.

“Perhaps you can’t hop?” said the Sparrow.

“Can’t I though!” said the Frog. “If I chose, I could hop a good deal farther than you.”

“If you could hop, I should think you’d have a

try for that bluebottle sitting on the thistle near you."

"I'll open my mouth wide," said the Frog, "and perhaps he may come in. Why, there he goes right away. What an unlucky fellow I am, to be sure!"

"Dear me!" said the Sparrow, "do you call that being unlucky? I'm sure my nestlings at home open their mouths wide enough, but nothing ever drops into them but what I put there. But I must be off."

That evening, when the Trout came up for his supper, there sat the Frog in the same place.

"Good evening, Froggie," he said. "How many flies have popped down your throat since I saw you last? Not many, I'm afraid. Why you are getting thin; your yellow skin hangs quite loose, and your eyes look positively goggle!"

"Those kind of jokes are never in good taste," answered the Frog; and as he showed no inclination to continue the conversation, the Trout went about his own affairs.

Next morning the Sparrow appeared again, and there sat the Frog as before.

“ Halloo ! Froggie,” cried she, “ you there still ! What are you waiting for ? ”

“ I am waiting for Providence to send a fly,” replied the Frog, but this time he spoke rather hesitatingly, for he was beginning to feel weak and hungry.

“ Providence only helps those who help themselves,” said the Sparrow. “ I don’t believe a fly will be sent.”

“ I certainly am a most unlucky beggar,” said the Frog. “ The number of flies that pass this way ! and not one of them comes in, though I open my mouth so wide that my jaws ache.”

The Sparrow hopped up to him and looked at him for a moment with her head on one side.

“ Well, you are a queer fish ! ” she said.

“ I am not a fish at all,” replied the Frog, with calm dignity ; and the Sparrow picked up a fine worm, and flew off to her nestlings.

After she was gone the Frog observed a little

blue butterfly sitting on a blade of grass near. The pangs of hunger induced him to stretch his yellow neck for it, but so slowly that the blue butterfly had time to escape.

“Just like my luck!” soliloquised the Frog. “What’s the use of exerting oneself? Nothing ever comes of it. How weak I feel, to be sure! I think it’s the effort of holding my mouth open so long that knocks me up. I’ll go to sleep.”

But he had scarcely closed his eyes when a rustling sound close to him made him open them. There, between him and the sunlight, loomed a dark figure with cruel eyes. It was the great shrike or butcher-bird. Poor Froggie!

While he was thinking what an unlucky fellow he was, the butcher-bird pounced on him, and put an end to his existence; after which he deposited him on a thorn, till he should feel inclined to eat him.

“Well, Froggie, you there still?” cried the Trout, when he came up in the evening. “Why,

he's gone ! What's become of him—fairly starved out ? ”

“ Killed and spitted,” said the Sparrow, who had watched the whole proceeding as he was concealed in a bush.

“ Poor fellow ! ” said the Trout ; “ I was afraid it might end so.”

But in truth he had never thought of it till that minute.

The Sparrow went home and told her young ones all poor Froggie’s history, impressing on them that it was of no use to be able to ‘hop well, or to be a fine swimmer, if one only sat all day on a bank ; that dinners didn’t drop into people’s mouths, however wide open they might be ; and that the sooner they could manage to fetch their own worms the better she should be pleased.

THE SONG-BIRDS.

SOMEWHERE in the South of England, there was a certain common, skirted on one side by a copsewood. It was not a pretty spot. The trees were crowded together, and, in consequence, stunted. Few wild flowers grew there. The primroses said the soil was too dry for them, and the dog-roses and the strawberry-blossoms found it too damp. There were no blue-bells, for what was the use of growing where it was too dark for anyone to admire their blue eyes? Only a few violets were to be found, for they don't care about being looked at, and are contented with a very retired life.

The bit of common was too exposed to suit the taste of any of them, and nothing grew there but a few scraggy furze-bushes and a little scant

heather, which one does not notice more than grass. In the pleasant spring-time, when the



hedgerows were white with may-blossom, and other woods teemed with primroses, blue-bells,

and anemones, the little children of the country round knew that it was of no use for them to take their baskets there; they would have to carry them away as empty as they brought them.

But the spot had its attractions after all; and the children and the field-labourers liked to go that way, for was not the air filled with sweet sounds? For some reason or other, the song-birds seemed all to have chosen it as their favourite resort. The children said that there, in the early spring, the cuckoo's note was to be heard first of all. On that bare briery bit of common the skylark loved to make her nest, and would mount high in the air, carolling loud and joyously. The copsewood was thronged with blackbirds, thrushes, and linnets, that sang away all day long, and wood-pigeons, which cooed unweariedly; and in the evening, when the sun went down, and the silver moon relieved his watch, the hushed air throbbed with the sad, sweet strains of the nightingale.

Now, one would have thought that, as all these

birds of song had fixed upon the same spot as their home, and shared one great joy and delight (for music was a joy and delight to all), they would have rejoiced together night and day ; but this was not the case, and often their sweet chants were marred by discordant notes. These discordant notes were nothing but disparaging remarks about one another. They did not vaunt themselves, or boast of their own performances ; they were too well-bred birds for that (except, perhaps, the cuckoo, who might be a shade egotistical), but they deprecated each other. There were endless little jealousies and envyings among them. If the children lingered on their way to school listening to the lark, and hastened home in the evening unmindful of the nightingale's song, the nightingale would be annoyed, and if the workmen hurried to their work in the early morning without noticing the song of the lark, and paused on their return to hear the nightingale, the lark would be put out.

“ What a fuss people make about nightingales ! ”

said a Lark one day ; “ for my part, I don’t care much for that dismal style of singing.”

“ A nightingale is all very well,” answered a Thrush, “ so long as you don’t see her, but really she is so very homely in appearance, that if you once catch a glimpse of her the illusion is destroyed.”

“ I don’t think looks matter much,” remarked a Hedge-sparrow, who was not over handsome himself ; “ nightingales are certainly plain, and so are their eggs, and yet you know that a great poet says, ‘ the music of the moon sleeps in them ;’ ” but, as the Hedge-sparrow had neither ear nor voice, his opinion went for nothing.

Meanwhile the Nightingale was remarking to a blackbird, “ Friend lark is determined to get the start of us all in the morning ; I can’t say I much like being roused up at such an unearthly hour ; after working hard all night, one naturally likes a little sleep in the morning.”

“ Dear me ! ” put in a Night-jar. “ I should have thought, with your musical soul, you would have liked nothing better than being lulled to

sleep by such passing sweet strains; now if *I* complained, who don't set up for that sort of thing, there might be some reason in it." But as the Night-jar could not have sung a note to save his life, no one attended to him, and the Nightingale went on as if he had never spoken:—

"Robin Redbreast has a pretty little voice enough, what a pity he sings with his head all on one side, it looks so like affectation."

"More like twittering than singing, I should call it," said a Linnet.

Now Jenny Wren chanced to be on a twig close by when these remarks were made. It so happened that she took a particular interest in Robin's performances, and naturally felt hurt and indignant.

"Cock Robin is not in the least affected," she said, "and his song is as sweet as any of yours. Besides, he has more perseverance than you all; he sings the whole year round, even when the snow is on the ground, from pure love of his art." And she fluffed up her brown feathers and

went off in a huff, and repeated the whole conversation to Robin.

“Jenny Wren need not have put herself in such a fuss,” went on the Linnet. “I am sure I did not mean to under-rate Robin’s musical powers, only it seems rather a pity that people with so *very* little voice should try to sing. The Wood-pigeon, for instance, she has not more than two or three notes altogether, and it becomes monotonous.” Just then the Wood-pigeon flew up; fortunately she did not catch her own name, and the Linnet tried to look unconscious, and turned to her saying, “We were talking about the Lark—what do you think of her voice ? ”

“She has great compass certainly,” cooed the Wood-pigeon; “but isn’t it a little shrill on the high notes ? ”

“Here comes the Cuckoo,” said the Thrush, “he’ll sing us all down ! What a fine organ it is, and what a pity he doesn’t cultivate it a little more.”

In this way they cried down one another’s

performances, and the sweet concert of the woods was less sweet than it might have been. All the birds knew that they were being criticised by their neighbours, and instead of opening their beaks joyously, and sending their voices heavenwards in glad thankfulness for their good gifts, they lost confidence and became self-conscious. The lark broke down in her highest note, and the nightingale faltered in her sweetest trill. Some of the birds flew right away and sung in other woods, and would not come back. Thus the copsewood lost its reputation, and the workmen and the children ceased to linger there and listen.

One day an old Rook, who we know is the wisest of birds, perched himself on a bough, and gave a lecture to all the other birds.

“I’m not much of a musician myself,” he said, “and don’t wish to be,—not but what we black-coats manage to waken up the woods among us pretty well,—but I have heard how the music here has fallen off, and it strikes me in this light.

You have no one but yourselves to thank, and you are a pack of silly birds for your pains.” Here there was a movement of dissatisfaction among the song-birds, but the Rook went on, “Why should there be any rivalry amongst you? Your heaven-sent voices have each their own beauty and individuality, and no more interfere with one another than a daisy does with a buttercup. You are all birds of song, and the copse-wood and the common belong to all. You should glory in each other’s music as much as in your own. See how we rooks stick by one another, and how well we get on. You musicians should do the same. Have a little of what my grandmother, who once crossed the Channel and came back with a good many French notions, used to call *esprit de corps*. If you really valued music as much as you say you do, you would love it for its own sake; but I begin to think that all you really care for is the sound of your own voices. *Good morning.*” And he flew away, followed by applauding companions.

After he was gone there was a long silence in the wood. The song-birds all hung their heads and drooped their wings, for they felt that the Rook was right.

THE LILY PRINCESS.

THERE was once a Princess with eyes as blue as the sea, a smile of heavenly sweetness, and hair which fell around her like a mantle of cloth of gold. Her skin was so fair, and her form so slight and graceful, that she was known throughout the length and breadth of her father's kingdom by the name of the Lily Princess. Never was princess so beloved as this one, and this was strange, because she was not exactly an amiable or gentle young maiden. Her royal parents worshipped the ground she trod on, so did the young Prince Eifrig, to whom she had been betrothed in early childhood, and who was heir to the kingdom adjoining that of her father. In the royal household, and indeed throughout the whole country, no one spoke much

of the King and Queen. It was always, "The Lily Princess thinks this," or "The Lily Princess wishes that," and the King and Queen were quite content that it should be so. Every day at the palace the grand question was, "What can be devised to amuse the Princess?" and every day the question became more difficult to answer, for the Princess grew tired of every amusement and occupation. "Is there anything that can be thought of that would give you pleasure, my sweet child?" her royal mother would ask. Sometimes the Princess would answer—

"Nothing on this earth!" which was very discouraging. Sometimes, however, she would say, "There is only one thing I never weary of, and that is tormenting Prince Eifrig. I would he were here now, that I might so divert myself."

When the Lily Princess made this answer, the old Queen would be enchanted, and send off at once for Prince Eifrig, who, immediately on receiving the message, whether engaged in the most important affairs of state or in the midst of the

excitement of the chase, would mount his swiftest steed, and never once look round till he reached the side of his betrothed. Such a summons was dearly welcome to him, as, did he visit her of his own accord, the Princess would most likely run away and hide herself, or pretend not to be aware of his presence, or, still worse, order him to go back where he came from. He was a comparatively happy man, therefore, when she contented herself with playing off on him every kind of trick—such as ordering his favourite horse to be let loose in the forest, or bestowing his costly gifts to herself upon a scullery wench before his very eyes. “Pretty childish pranks,” he called them; but his heart was very heavy at times for all that, and he longed ardently for the day when she should outgrow them, and consent to be his wife, for it was impossible to conceive a royal matron conducting herself in such a manner. The worst of all was, that his prospects of future happiness seemed so very, very far off; for did he venture even to allude to the possibility of their union to his

affianced bride, she was as likely as not to hurl some ponderous missile at his head.

“There is,” said the Lily Princess one day to her betrothed, “hard by a marvellously deep well; if you throw a pebble down it you can hear it go bump, bump, from side to side, for full twelve minutes before it reaches the water at the bottom. Shall we repair there and amuse ourselves in this manner?”

“By all means,” answered Prince Eifrig, and his heart beat high with pleasure as the Princess linked her arm affectionately in his, and led him to a beautiful spot among the rocks, where there was an old well with a natural spring of exquisitely clear water at the bottom. It was overgrown with creeping plants and dainty ferns and moss, and had apparently been hewn out of the solid rock. The Lily Princess stooped down by it, and her wonderful hair fell over her like a golden cloud. “Now throw pebbles,” she cried; and Prince Eifrig did as she desired, but they did not take as long to reach the bottom as he expected.

“Quite twelve minutes, wasn’t it?” asked the Princess.

“N—no, not quite, I think,” answered Prince Eifrig, hesitating; for though he loved his betrothed to distraction, he also loved the truth.

The Lily Princess rose to her feet and stamped.

“I tell you it was!” she cried; but in another moment she had calmed herself, and said quite gently, “I wonder how long a diamond would take—a large diamond!”

“About the same time as a pebble, I should think,” replied the Prince cautiously.

“I believe it would take *longer still*,” said the Princess. “Try.”

“My sweet blossom,” answered Prince Eifrig rather uneasily, “there are no diamonds here.”

The Lily Princess stretched out to him one of her dimpled hands, on which glistened a diamond worth at least half a kingdom. It was her betrothal ring, Prince Eifrig’s gift. “Try,” she repeated.

The Prince turned as white as the hand that was held out to him.

“I will not!” he cried.

Now there was one threat of a most awful nature which the Princess occasionally used to gain her ends when all other means failed.

“If you don’t do it,” she said, “*I’ll cut off all my hair.*”

The Prince threw an agonized glance at those matchless locks shining in the sunlight like burnished gold ; then in desperation he seized the ring and flung it down.

“If it was to be,” he cried, “you might at least have spared me this humiliation ! If the bauble was so utterly worthless in your eyes, why not fling it away with your own hand ?”

“Because,” said the Princess, bursting into a merry peal of laughter, which the rocks echoed back—“because I want to be able to tell my royal parents and all the courtiers that *you* threw my betrothal ring down a well !”

Prince Eifrig turned away to hide his emotion ;

but, in spite of all his efforts to control himself, one big tear gathered in his eye, and fell down over the brink of the well.

“What!” cried the Princess, “another diamond! This is even more than I asked for; your goodness overpowers me! To reward you, I promise that if you will go down the well on some very cold morning and fetch up the ring, I will wear it again.”

The Prince buried his face in his hands; his heart was so sore that he could not trust himself to speak. Something in his demeanour touched the Lily Princess at last.

“Never mind,” she cried; “take heart, my good Eifrig. We will be married to-morrow, and then it won’t matter about the ring, will it?”

The Prince started to his feet in joyful surprise.

“My beloved one!” he exclaimed, “do you really mean what you say, or are you only jesting?”

“I am quite in earnest!” cried the Princess. “I am tired of my life, and I should like to be

married for a change. Let us go back to the castle at once and tell my royal parents. My bridal dress has, I know, been prepared for many years."

The old King and Queen were beyond measure overjoyed when they heard of this determination of the Princess. Hitherto, when any one had dared to suggest her fixing a time for her marriage, she had laughed the idea to scorn, and they had begun to fear that the alliance they so much desired might never be accomplished. The news of the Lily Princess's intention spread like wildfire through the palace, and the most magnificent preparations for the ceremonial were set on foot. Prince Eifrig could hardly believe in his own happiness, which was, however, slightly marred by a haunting fear that his betrothed might change her mind the next day. On the morrow, however, the Princess arose with her determination unshaken.

"I will be married at sunset," she said, and all the bells rung and the city was wild with rejoicing.

Never had the Lily Princess looked fairer or sweeter than in her bridal robe. It was of pure white satin embroidered with pearls. Her train was caught back here and there with bunches of lilies formed entirely of pearls; pearls of priceless value gleamed on her neck and arms and among her golden curls, and over all floated a light veil. The old King and Queen and all the courtiers shed tears of emotion as they gazed at the lovely picture, and Prince Eifrig was bewildered with joy.

“All is prepared,” he cried, “and the priest waits to join our hands together. Come, dearest.”

“The holy man must wait a few minutes longer,” answered the Princess. “I am determined to have just one more game at hide-and-seek” (a game ill fitting a royal matron) “first—just one little, little game. There, take away my train and my veil!” she cried to her attendants, and in spite of the entreaties of those about her, she unfastened the costly robe which formed her train, and the satin and the lilies fell to the ground. Then she threw aside her bridal veil.

“ There, I am free yet a little longer ! ” she cried. “ I forbid any one to follow me for full fifteen minutes ; if they do, I will never be married at all. I am going to hide in the forest,” and to the consternation of all around her, she glided from amongst them, passing from their sight like a lovely vision.

Now this game of hide-and-seek in the forest, on the borders of which the castle stood, was a favourite pastime of the Lily Princess when in an amiable mood, and one in which Prince Eifrig was, generally speaking, only too proud and happy to join ; but he, as well as all those present, felt how unsuitable it was at such a moment ; however, he tried to put a good face on the matter, saying cheerfully—

“ The ceremony will only be delayed a very short time. The Princess never ventures far into the forest. I know all her favourite hiding-places, and will soon bring her back.”

“ But her bridal dress,” cried the Queen, “ it will be stained and torn, and the pearls displaced ! ”

and she wrung her hands, upon which the ladies of the Court wrung their hands too.

Prince Eifrig was meanwhile counting the moments; and, at the expiration of the allotted time, ran lightly out into the forest, followed by those ladies and gentlemen of the Court who were accustomed to join in the game. In vain they searched, the Lily Princess was nowhere to be found. The sun set, and the twilight deepened, and still they searched, and still no Lily Princess was to be found. Prince Eifrig was beside himself; he rushed wildly hither and thither, and rent the air with his cries, as he implored her by every endearing name he could think of to come forth from her hiding-place.

“It is only a jest,” he kept repeating; “doubtless she is concealed close by.” He would not acknowledge, even to himself, the terrible fear that was creeping over him, that his bride had really ventured too far into the wide lonely forest, and had missed her way amidst the gathering shades of night. Darkness came on, and every man in

the Castle, from the old King himself and the Lord Chamberlain, down to the meanest scullion, went forth into the forest with a torch-light in his hand; and, as the alarm spread through the city, hundreds more joined in the search, but all in vain.

“A thousand crowns for the shred of a white dress!” cried the King; but there was not a man among them all who would have taken such a reward.

“When the moon rises we shall find her!” said Prince Eifrig, for he was young and hopeful, but the old King wept and would not take comfort.

“Our Lily is lost!” he said.

At midnight the moon rose, and bathed the forest in pure white light, and the searchers extinguished their torches and took heart. Again and again did Prince Eifrig fancy he discerned a white glimmer among the trees, which might be the form of his lost bride, and with a cry of joy rush towards it, but again and again it proved nothing but a cold mocking moonbeam.



The red sun was fast sinking behind the trees when the Lily Princess ran into the forest to hide.

“So much the better,” she thought, “they will have more difficulty in finding me. I will go farther in than I have ever been before, in among the shadows they will never see me, and suddenly I will spring out and frighten Eifrig out of his five wits,” and she laughed to herself as she glided in among the trees and crouched down. Deeper and deeper grew the shadows, and in the Princess’s hiding-place it was soon quite dark.

“Why doesn’t Eifrig come this way?” she thought. “What a blunderer he is!”

At last, tired of her cramped position, she crept out expecting to find herself in comparative light, but behold the sun was gone and all was dim and dusk. She groped along in what she imagined to be the right direction, but all the time she was in reality penetrating farther and farther into the forest. “Suppose I am really lost!” she thought to herself, “that will be very diverting—for a little while that is,” she added. “I wonder if the priest

is waiting still with his book in his hand just where we left him," and at this idea she laughed out loud; but her laugh sounded strange in the loneliness and darkness, and her heart began to beat very fast. Suddenly, in the distance between the trees, she saw a light. "From the Castle, doubtless," she thought, and with a thrill of relief she pressed forwards towards it. In another minute she saw that it moved, and guessed it must be borne by some one in search of her. It was in truth the torch which Prince Eifrig himself carried, who had wandered away a few paces from his own party. It seemed to the Princess to flicker in and out, in and out, and at last it disappeared altogether. In vain she turned this way and that trying to catch sight of it again. In vain she lifted her voice and repeated Prince Eifrig's name. All was stillness and darkness; and at last, weary and worn, she sat down under a tree feeling very much inclined to weep.

"I will stay here till they find me," she said aloud, "it can't be very long; and I don't think

I will ever play hide-and-seek in the forest again. It is not a very nice game, particularly after sunset. When I am married it will be necessary to leave off childish amusements. I think, too, that I should like to be a good and gentle wife to Eifrig, for, after all, I do love him better than all the world ! ”

“ Do you indeed ? ” said a little shrill voice close to her elbow, and the Princess started to her feet and shrieked aloud.

“ Ha ! ha ! ha ! ” laughed the little voice. “ I suppose that was why you threw the ring down the well ; you loved Prince Eifrig so much that you would do anything to please him, and you thought that would be the very thing he would like best ! I know all about it from my cousins, the nixies, to whom the well belongs.”

“ Who and what are you ? ” asked the terror-stricken Princess.

“ Wait a minute, and you shall see,” answered the voice, “ the moon will be up directly,” and at that moment the light of the rising moon came

streaming through the forest trees, and fell on the white shrinking form of the Lily Princess, and on the figure of a hideous little man, about a foot high, with a red beard and tiny wicked eyes.

“Did you never hear that there were pixies in the forest?” he asked.

“I have heard it,” faltered the Princess, “but I thought it was an old wife’s tale.”

“The fair Princess made a mistake for once in her life,” laughed the little man, “come with me and I will show you plenty more of us.”

“Kind sir,” said the Princess, clasping her hands together, “you know the forest well, no doubt, will you not show me the way out, and I will thank and bless you for ever?”

“I don’t care much for thanks and blessings,” answered the little man, “but follow me,” and the Princess followed him, her heart beating high with hope. A few minutes’ walk brought her and her strange conductor into a clear space of green-sward, upon which she perceived hundreds of little

beings even smaller than her companion careering. In an instant she was surrounded by them.

“A pixie-led Princess!” they cried.

“I want to go home,” sobbed the frightened Princess.

“So you shall,” cried the little man with the red beard, dancing round her with glee. “You shall come home with me, down below. Here you are, pearls and all, and you can never get away! You see that line where the grass becomes a darker green; you can never pass it! Try!”

The poor Princess went towards the line he indicated, and found that when she reached it it was impossible to cross it. Her limbs seemed chained to the ground unless she moved in a backward direction.

“There’s no way out! no way out!” cried the little man, “and pearls enough for all of us.”

“You may have all the pearls and welcome,” said the Princess.

“Why of course I may,” answered her guide, “they are mine already. It’s time to go to bed!

Would you like to come home with me, or stay here alone in the forest and die of cold and hunger, and let us pick off the pearls at our leisure?"

"I won't do either!" cried the Princess, "I am going home to be married to Prince Eifrig."

"Oh! indeed, are you?" said the little man. "Well, good-night! pray don't let us detain you; and let me give you one piece of advice at parting, *don't* throw your wedding-ring down a well."

"You are a cruel wicked little monster!" exclaimed the Princess, exasperated beyond endurance, and she stamped her foot on the ground.

Her fury seemed to amuse the pixies immensely, for they burst into a chorus of shrill laughter and then scampered away in all directions, leaving her alone with Redbeard.

"Come, come," he said, "you needn't put yourself in such a taking; we wish you no ill. I have got a very cosy little place down below, where you will be made very welcome. The fact is that I am only a pixie on my mother's side, my father was a gnome, and I take more after him.

I get tired of dancing in the moonlight and all that sort of thing, particularly on cold nights, and prefer occupying myself with the more serious and interesting business of amassing treasure, as you'll see presently. You'll find it uncommonly comfortable down there. I like things snug and warm."

The Princess felt that for this night at least there was no choice left her. It was certain she could not find her way out of the forest, or even pass the fairy ring without the aid of the pixies; and her only hope of obtaining food and shelter was by following her guide. No doubt the next day, in broad daylight, she would be able to find her way home without difficulty. Her hideous little companion conducted her through the mouth of a cave, down, down, it seemed to her, into the depths of the earth. At last they reached a large hall, cut out of the solid rock, entirely lighted by phosphorus, which gave it a mysterious and gloomy appearance. Here and there were heaps of gold and precious stones gleaming in the green light, with numbers of queer little men and

women, like her companion, engaged in arranging and piling them up.

“Diamonds, rubies, and emeralds, you see,” said Redbeard, “but till now not a single pearl !”

The gnomes seemed all delighted at the arrival of the Princess. They brought her food and water, and touched the pearl embroidery and the golden tips of her hair lovingly and reverently. They evidently regarded her as something very valuable, which had come into their possession. The Princess, worn out with fatigue and fright, laid down on the ground, with a heap of amethysts for her pillow, and soon fell asleep. Early in the morning she awoke, fancying herself in her own luxurious chamber in the castle, and wondering at the strange light. She started up, and soon the miserable history of the night before flashed upon her. Her first impulse was to get up into the open air, out of the oppressive atmosphere, as fast as possible. But, alas ! she could find no exit anywhere. The solid rock was closed all round, except a small aperture just big enough to admit a gnome, and through

which the little man with the red beard soon appeared, bringing her some food.

“ Eat and be strong,” he said, “ and set to work.”

“ What work ? ” answered the Princess ; “ I have never done any work.”

“ Not even threading beads ? ” asked the little man.

The Princess allowed that she had occasionally threaded beads.

“ Well,” said Redbeard, “ we want all this mass of pearls you carry about with you unpicked, and threaded on golden threads. Every gnome must have a pearl necklace, and mine must have three rows to it.”

“ But where is the gold thread ? ” asked the Princess, a great hope filling her mind that when this task was completed the gnomes would have got all they wanted out of her, and would let her go home.

“ Why here, to be sure,” answered the little man, standing on tip-toe, and touching the match-

less locks which streamed over the Princess's shoulders.

“*My hair!*” shrieked the Lily Princess; “why Prince Eifrig would cut off every one of your heads, sooner than a single hair of mine should be so desecrated!”

“Here is a sharp-edged diamond,” said Redbeard quietly, “which will answer the purpose very well.”

And in an instant the horrid little man had sprung upon the Princess's shoulder, and, in spite of her frantic efforts to free herself, there was soon another heap of gold on the floor of the cave. Then Redbeard jumped down, and danced round it with delight.

“There'll be some left,” he cried, “even when all the necklaces are made; and, meantime, you will be growing another crop for us.”

The poor Princess embraced her fallen locks with many tears. “Ah!” she thought to herself, “if Eifrig or my royal parents could see this sight, they would surely die of grief.”

“Come, set to work ! ” said Redbeard briskly.

“If I make all these necklaces,” asked the Lily Princess, “will you promise to let me go home ? ”

“Yes,” answered Redbeard, “you shall go if you still wish it ; but the probability is that you will have become so attached to our superior mode of life, that you will prefer remaining where you are. A pearl-laden being, the object of whose existence seems to be the production of gold, must have some common sense. I dare say you’ll live a good many years.” He added this last sentence in a contemplative tone, gazing at the Princess with his head a little on one side.

“But you promise to let me go ? ” repeated the Lily Princess.

“I promise fast enough,” answered Redbeard.

So the poor Princess set to work to thread the pearls on the hairs of her head, and very slow work she found it. Her spirit was quite broken by the loss of her cherished locks ; and as she sat there, crouched down among the tangled masses of gold, with drooping head, and torn discoloured robe, she

looked like a lily that has been battered to pieces by the rain. She did not know how the time passed—hours, days, weeks, months, it was all the same in that strange phosphoric light. The gnomes took a great interest in her work, crowding round her, and asking questions; and as fast as a necklace was finished, there was a squabble who should have it. They were also greatly excited about the growth of her hair, and were continually measuring it, and feeling it, and disputing about how soon it would be worth while to crop it again. One little maiden gnome was of a different nature to the others. In spite of her hideous little visage, she seemed to have the tender heart of a human child.

“I will do without a necklace,” she whispered, “and that will be one less for you to make, and one golden hair for you to keep for yourself.” And hour after hour she would sit at the Princess’s feet, and pick up the fallen pearls for her.

“She must be a changeling,” thought the Princess, and her heart ached for some poor mother,

who had doubtless had a wicked little elf placed in the cradle in the form of her own sweet babe.

The Lily Princess worked bravely on—the hope of freedom and a joyful return to her home ever before her ; but she faded and drooped more and more like a flower shut out from the light of day and the warmth of the sun.

On fine moonlight nights Redbeard would occasionally go up into the forest to visit his pixie relations. The Princess implored him to take her up too, so that she might at least breathe the pure fresh air once more.

“ Not till all the necklaces are finished,” said he, “ then you may go up and dance as much as you like. The outer air might perhaps promote the growth of your hair.”

“ But then I am going home,” answered the Princess.

Time passed away, and still she worked on at the necklaces, but the pearl embroidery diminished very slowly, and sometimes she lost heart altogether.”

“Why do you weep?” asked the little maiden gnome, nestling close up to her.

“Because I cannot yet return to those I love,” answered the Princess, “who doubtless mourn me as dead.”

“*I* love you,” whispered the little gnome; “you are so mild and gentle.”

“Alas! little one,” answered the Princess, “you mistake. I am not mild or gentle.”

“But I will be—I will be,” she thought to herself. “When I go home I will be so gentle and loving that they will scarce know me. I will be pleased with everything, and kind and courteous to all. I will never plague Prince Eifrig more, and perhaps I will tell him how I love him!” And then she worked on at the necklaces with renewed vigour. At last they were finished. The Lily Princess could not tell whether months or years had passed away. To her it seemed a lifetime.

“Now at length I am free,” she cried, as the last necklace was completed, and flung over the head of a tiny gnome, who danced with glee. “Good

Master Redbeard, I claim your promise. Show me the way through the forest to my own home."

"What!" cried the little man, "you want to go home and tell all our secrets, do you?—where the gnomes live, and where the gold and diamonds are to be found?"

"Nay, I do not!" cried the Princess. "You shall lead me blindfold through the forest, if you will."

"No, no," said Redbeard; "we must make all surer than that. The word of a gnome is sacred, and you may go home, if you are fool enough to do so, according to my promise; but it must not be as a fine princess, with the powers of speech, and a nation of human beings, all pixie and gnome haters, at her beck and call. If you are determined to go, we will change you into some dumb creature—a wild animal or bird of the forest; but if you'll take my advice, you will spend the rest of your life comfortably, as you are, with us. To-night I will open the rock a little way, and you

shall go up and dance in the moonlight for a change."

But the Lily Princess was heartbroken.

"If I stay here without hope," she said, "I shall die. How could you deceive me so cruelly?"

Redbeard and his companions only laughed, and said, "Choose."

"If it must be so, then," cried the poor Princess, "I will be changed into a bird, and fly home to those I love. Far better so than die a prisoner here."

"As you please," said Redbeard, carelessly, "name your bird."

"I will be a dove," replied the Princess, "a gentle little dove; but can I never, never be a Princess again?"

"Never," answered Redbeard, "so you had better think well before you decide."

"I have decided," answered the Princess.

"And will you fly away and leave me?" whispered the little maiden gnome.

"Yes, little one," answered the Princess, "I

must fly to one whom I love more than all, to nestle in his bosom, and coo my words of love into his ear, since I can never, never speak them; but I shall often think of my little gnome friend."

"Farewell, then!" wept the fairy child.

So they changed the Lily Princess into a dove, with soft eyes and snow-white plumage.

"A bird can find its own way," said Red-beard; and she crept through the aperture in the rock up into the cool green forest sleeping in the moonlight. Once more she breathed the sweet air, and tears of joy and thankfulness filled her eyes. For a moment she forgot that she was not after all the bride-Princess escaped from her prison, on her way to her home and her bridegroom, but only a poor little wandering bird. She stretched out her wings and rose gently upwards, wheeling round and round in a spiral flight, up, up far over the forest trees; then, guided by some strange instinct, away she flew, on and on through space, till at length in the dim distance she discerned the lights of a great city.

The holy stars looked kindly down at the lonely little dove as she flew swiftly and steadily on towards the distant light, while all other birds in the great still forest slept, each little head tucked comfortably under its wing.

* * * *

A hot summer day had drawn to a close, and the old King and Queen sat together in their private apartment, with windows and doors thrown open to admit the cool night air. Two long years had rolled away since they had lost the darling of their hearts, the Lily Princess; but they had not ceased for a single hour to mourn for her.

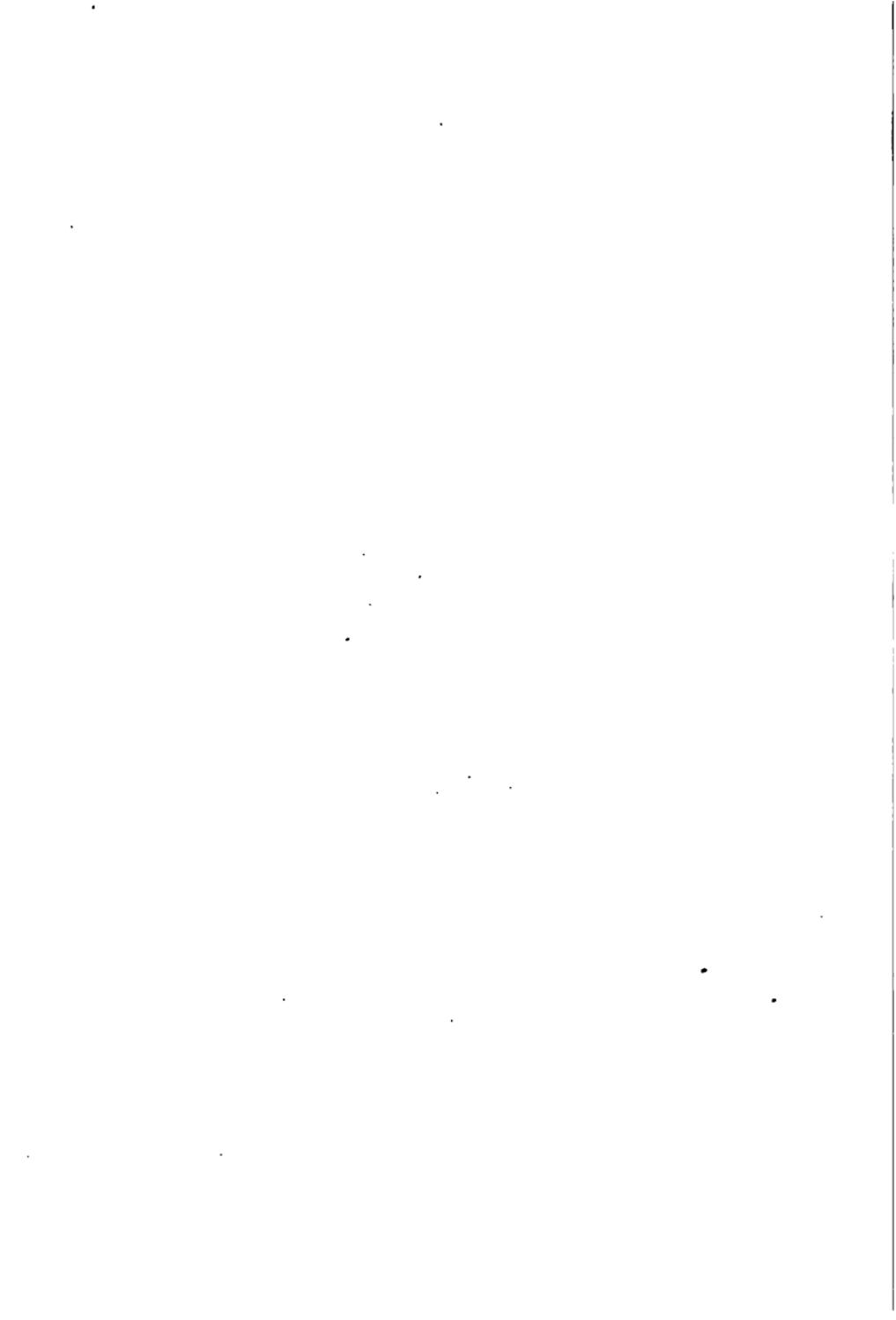
On this evening, as they talked together of her as usual, in sad low tones, the Queen's attention was suddenly attracted by a bird which flew in through the casement and lighted softly on the sill.

“Oh! look at that pretty bird,” she cried, “it must be a tame pigeon which has strayed from its home.” She went cautiously towards it, but it did not seem in the least frightened, and as she



THE LILY PRINCESS.

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approached perched on her wrist. The old King advanced too and caressed the gentle little creature.

“Oh! what a sweet bird!” said the Queen; “I wish it would stay with us always.” She little knew that it was her own lost daughter who looked at her with those beseeching eyes. She cooed softly and lovingly to her parents, asking their forgiveness a thousand times for the sorrow she had caused them, if they could but have understood her, but she could not stay with them; out again into the night she flew, and away over the hills to another royal dwelling. It was midnight when she reached the castle, and Prince Eifrig had gone to rest in his turret-chamber. The moonbeams streamed in through the open casement, and fell on the couch where he lay, and he slept on all unconscious that a little wandering dove, with loving eyes and a sad heart, was gazing at him. She would not disturb his slumber, but sat watching him through the long night. When Prince Eifrig woke in the early morning he was well pleased

with the tame pigeon which had flown into his chamber and seemed to wish to stay with him, and soon he grew to love it dearly.

“Perhaps some fair mistress is sighing for your loss you gentle little bird,” he would say; “but I trust she will never learn where you are, for I could not bear to part with you,” and he ordered all dogs and cats to be banished from the castle, so that his pet might fly about in perfect safety. He had a beautiful dovecote made for her, just outside his chamber window, but she did not care much for it. Wherever the Prince was she loved to be, and though sometimes she would fly out through the castle windows, and soar high in the sky, trying to forget her sorrows in the clear blue ether, she would soon descend and return to the Prince’s side; and when she lighted on his shoulder and cooed lovingly into his ear, he little thought that under those soft feathers beat the heart of his own lost bride. For one long year after the loss of the Lily Princess, Prince Eifrig had mourned for her night and day, and would

not take comfort; but he was young, and as time wore on the King and Queen, his parents, and all those about him, rejoiced to see him begin to smile again and take interest in things around.

Now about two days sail from the rocky coast on which Prince Eifrig's castle stood there was a lovely green island, over which reigned a young maiden Queen, the fame of whose wondrous beauty and goodness spread far and wide.

"I would fain visit that beautiful island," said Prince Eifrig one day to his parents.

The King and Queen were delighted with this idea.

"For who knows," they whispered to one another, "but our son may yet take a wife? and what bride could be more fitting than the sweet Island Queen?" and they nodded to each other with so much satisfaction that Prince Eifrig guessed what they were talking about, and shook his head sorrowfully.

"My Lily bride is lost," he said. "I will never wed another." As he spoke the white

pigeon, who was perched near, fluttered up to him, and laid her little head softly against his cheek.

“My dear little dove shall be my sole companion,” said the Prince fondly. “See how she loves me! Methinks some instinct tells her when I am sad.”

“You are young,” said the old Queen; “young folks often change their minds. I shall not despair of a daughter-in-law yet, and there is none would please me better than the Island Queen.”

“Nay,” answered the Prince, “I will gladly visit the Green Island, and be a guest for a while of the sweet and gracious lady who reigns there, but she can never be wife of mine.”

The King and Queen did not give up hope, however. They ordered a splendid ship to be made ready for the Prince and his retinue, and they sailed away to visit the Island Queen. The white pigeon went too. She sat on the rigging near the Prince, with drooping wings and dull eyes, for her heart was oppressed with forebodings.

“You do not love the salt air and the rough

winds, my woodland bird," said Prince Eifrig; "but we shall soon be among trees and flowers again."

At length they reached the Green Island, which lay smiling in the sunshine, and as the Prince leapt lightly on shore his heart bounded with delight at the loveliness and luxuriance of the scene around him. Rich vineyards and rose-embowered banks flourished almost down to the white sanded beach. The air was laden with the scent of orange-groves and fields of hyacinth, and down the glens and soft declivities crept numbers of little cascades, keeping all cool and fresh. There, amongst the flowers, dwelt the Island Queen, and Prince Eifrig found her even more beautiful than he had expected. Her splendid dark eyes expressed nothing but love and tenderness, and her bearing towards those around her was gentle and courteous. She welcomed Prince Eifrig to her dominions with infinite grace and sweetness, and they wandered together among the orange and citron groves and through verdant glades draperied with vines, and

arched overhead with a fretwork of interlacing boughs. The Prince's tame pigeon accompanied them on their rambles, taking long flights through the silent air with outspread, motionless wings, and resting on a branch or on a tall tree-fern till they overtook her. Then she would soar upwards to the heights of heaven, and float down again in a slanting descent and alight at their feet. At times she would gaze at them with such a sad wistful expression that the Island Queen said—

“Her eyes are like those of a human creature.”

So Prince Eifrig lingered on in the Green Island, which seemed to him to grow fairer every hour, and somehow it came about that the dark-eyed young Queen grew very dear to him indeed, and before many days had passed he told her so, and she promised to be his wife.

“And now I must hasten home again,” said Prince Eifrig, “to rejoice the hearts of my royal parents with the good tidings, and that all may be speedily arranged for our marriage.”

“You must not sail to-night,” said the Island

Queen, gazing out over the open sea. "Look at the colour of the water and the curl of the waves, and that little cloud rising in the far west. There will be a storm."

But Prince Eifrig laughed away her fears as he wished her farewell.

"I must also bid adieu to your dear white dove," said the young Queen, and she caressed her gently; but the little bird shrank from her touch, and hid herself in the Prince's breast.

"She will soon learn to love you, too, sweet one," said Prince Eifrig.

The fair ship sailed, and the Green Island faded and faded from the Prince's view till it was but a dim grey outline. Then it happened, as the Island Queen had feared, the wind rose and the sky darkened, and there was a terrific storm. For three days the ship tossed about, driven hither and thither by wind and waves. The seamen, worn out with fatigue and exposure, gave up all for lost; but the young Prince himself took his place at the helm, and fought bravely with the raging

elements, while the pigeon hid her affrighted head in his bosom.

“Fly away and save yourself, my faithful dove,” said the Prince. “Those strong pinions will bear you safely to land. Why should you perish with your unfortunate master?” And he shook the bird free; but she only fluttered a little way, to return and nestle closer to him than before. “I will die thus,” she thought to herself.

But suddenly there was a break in the storm, the winds hushed, and the clouds rolled asunder. Then Prince Eifrig’s heart was filled with hope and thankfulness; he renewed his efforts, and cheered and encouraged the desponding seamen, and at day-break the fourth day he guided the storm-tossed ship, now little more than a battered hulk, safely into harbour. The young Queen, meanwhile, watched and wept in her island home; she knew well the signs of sea and sky, and could find no comfort from them.

Hardly were the Prince and his companions safe on shore than the storm burst forth again with

redoubled fury. The Prince's first thought, when he had embraced his parents, was of sending tidings of his safety to his affianced bride ; but how could another ship be sent forth in such wild weather ?

“ Could not your Highness's bird take a message ? ” suggested an old and trusty counsellor.

“ You mock me and my poor little dove,” answered the Prince. “ She loves me truly ; but she is but a dumb creature.”

“ Nay,” answered the counsellor, “ it is no idle jest of mine. I judge by her form and plumage that the bird belongs to a messenger race, and that instinct will lead her to fly back to the spot she has so lately left.”

“ Is it really so ? ” cried Prince Eifrig, overwhelmed with joy. “ We will speedily put it to the test ; ” and he wrote a few loving lines to his betrothed, and fastened them securely under the pigeon's wing, who looked at him the while with mild sad eyes. Then he opened his turret-window and gently freed the bird from the finger to which she clung.

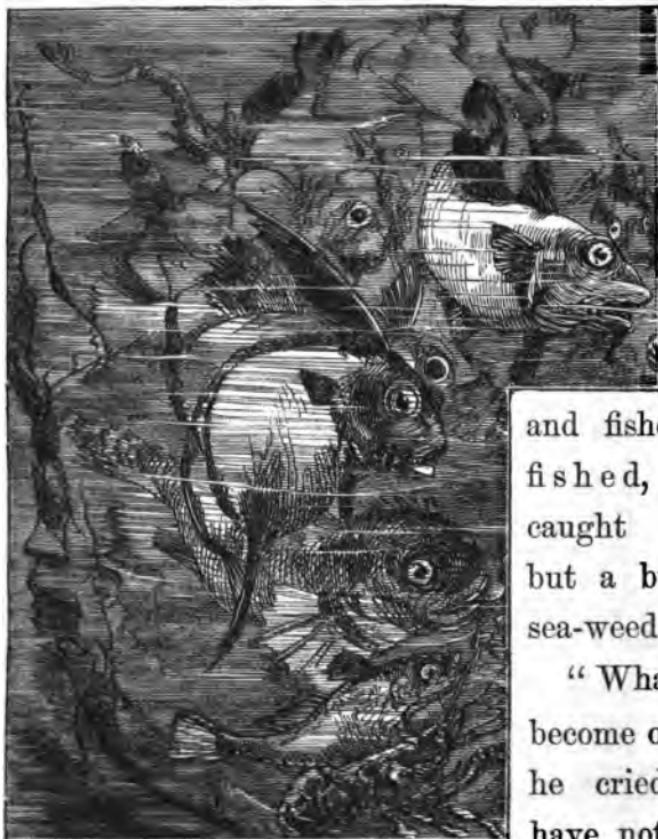
“Farewell, sweet messenger!” he cried; “and may naught of ill befall you.” And she rose upwards with her swift circular flight, higher and higher, till she was lost to the Prince’s anxious gaze, and her plumes were wet with the damp vapours of the passing clouds. Then onwards, far above the stormy sea, she winged her lonely way, never pausing till she regained the shores of the Green Island. The fair young Queen shed tears of joy at sight of the faithful little bird and the message she brought.

“And now you must stay with me awhile and rest these weary little wings,” she said tenderly; but the carrier pigeon would not rest, she scarcely tasted the food which was proffered to her, and fluttered ceaselessly against the window, which had been closed to prevent her escape.

“As you will, then,” said the Island Queen; “you shall return to your dear master; but you must bear one word of love to him.” Then she secured her message under the soft white wing and let her little prisoner free.

Swiftly rose the carrier pigeon, upwards far out of the Queen's sight, on her way back to Prince Eifrig. She never reached him ; in vain he watched for her return. What her fate had been none could tell—whether her strength had been exhausted by battling against the furious winds, and she had fallen into the raging sea below, or whether she had been seized by a bird of prey, no one knew ; but she never reached Prince Eifrig's side. He was wedded to the Island Queen, and they lived long and happily together. They often spoke to one another of the carrier pigeon—sometimes with tears ; but the name of the Lily Princess was never mentioned between them.

SHRIMP SAUCE.



THE
w a s
once a
p o o r
fisher-
m a n
w h o
fished,
and fished, and
fished, and
caught nothing
but a bunch of
sea-weed.
“What will
become of me?”
he cried; “I
have nothing to

take to market to-morrow, and there is not a farthing in the house ! If I go home with an empty basket my wife will certainly throw the frying-pan at my head, or possibly the tea-kettle ! ” and he began to sob so loud that the fish heard him far down under the water, and their soft hearts were touched with pity.

“ Will no one sacrifice himself ? ” exclaimed a Salmon enthusiastically ; “ it is a noble cause ! ” And he called together a meeting of fishes—one of every kind—to discuss the affair, and see what could be done. They arranged themselves in a ring, and the Salmon, as president, spoke first. He stated the fisherman’s case fully (which, however, they all knew already), and there was not a fish’s heart among them all which did not throb with sympathy.

“ Which amongst us will volunteer ? ” continued the Salmon. “ Gladly would I set the example myself, but I have a wife and upwards of fifty thousand children depending on me ; ” and tears of emotion streamed down his honest cheeks as he repeated, “ Will no one volunteer ? ”

There was a long silence ; perhaps the fish were all too much overcome to speak. At last a Sole raised his voice. "I would not hesitate a minute," said he, "personally to sacrifice myself, if it would be of any avail, but I fear I should be unsaleable. To make a decent appearance on a dinner table there must be a pair of us ; and, however willingly I might give my own life to such a cause, I could not feel justified in drawing into the sacrifice a brother Sole ! "

"The Plaice, perhaps ?" suggested the President.

Then spoke an orange-spotted Plaice, humbly and tearfully. "Alas !" he cried, "the poor man's sobs go to my heart, but what can I do ? There is no generosity in giving what is valueless, and the price I command in the market is so very low, it would not pay him or his wife for the trouble of carrying me there. Now a Turbot might make their fortune ! "

"True," said the President.

"I believe I am considered valuable," said the

Turbot, modestly. "But, 'noblesse oblige ;' one has claims ; one's life is not exactly one's own to dispose of as one would like."

"Possibly the Eel," put in the President.

"For my part," said the Eel, "nothing would be more satisfactory to my own feelings than to give myself to such a charitable object ; but one must not allow oneself to be carried away by enthusiasm and do things rashly. You know our family motto, 'Conger, ponder longer.' As I grow older I find myself longer and longer in coming to conclusions, and I fear that by the time I have fairly considered the subject, the poor man will be gone home."

"I shouldn't be long making up my mind," cried a romantic Sprat, "if I were only a little bigger. Dearly as I love the salt, salt waves, and my free, unfettered life, I would joyfully give up all and be fried and laid on a dish to serve a suffering human being. But what would be the use of one poor little sprat ? Oh to be a cod-fish !"

On this the Cod-fish felt moved to speak, which he did in a tone of deep regret.

“Pitying the poor man, as I do, from the bottom of my heart,” said he, “I really feel that I could not be justified in rendering him my assistance personally. No; my final dissolution must be devoted to a yet nobler cause. You all know my peculiar gift, and will, I am sure, agree with me that I have no right to throw it away. Why, properly prepared, it is so much human life in a bottle! Were I to obey the impulse of good-nature, and give myself into the hands of this rude fisherman, what would be the result? I should be treated just like any other fish, my precious property would be neglected, and, in short, the health of thousands would have been sacrificed for the life of one!”

The President began to despair. “Perhaps the Lobster?” he suggested.

“I would offer myself in a moment,” said the Lobster, “but it seems to me that in my case it would be no true kindness. Of course, as far as

my own feelings are concerned, nothing could be more gratifying ; but I doubt if I should ever be taken to market—the poor man and his wife would be unable to resist eating me for supper this very night. To-morrow they would be exceedingly ill in consequence. Then would follow doctors' bills, and they would probably both end their days in the workhouse, if not the gaol. When a question of an act of charity arises, it is right to consider the future, as well as the present emergency. If, by relieving the necessities of that poor family for the moment, I should be the means of bringing them eventually to destruction, I should never forgive myself.”

“ Exactly my sentiments,” said the Crab ; “ but I could never have expressed them so well.”

Then there was a long pause, broken at last by the President.

“ It must be conceded,” said he, “ that the matter we have in hand is of a very perplexing nature. At the same time, it is a painful fact that the position of the poor fisherman is becoming

every moment more critical. If no gentleman is able to offer his services, what is to be done? Will any one suggest anything—any medium course?"

But no medium course occurred to any one; they could only sigh and shake their heads.

"Well," said the Eel at last, "as it seems I can be of no further use, I may as well begin to wriggle home. I am sure our best thanks are due to Mr. President Salmon; and I can only say how heartily I wish circumstances had allowed me to come forward in so good a cause. Of one thing I am quite sure,—should any gentleman resolve to sacrifice himself, he will never repent so noble an act."

"Hear, hear!" said all the fish, [but still no one came forward.

Just as they were about to disperse, and were reiterating their thanks to the President, and saying what an interesting meeting it had been, in the midst of them all, peeping up through the sand, appeared two tiny black eyes with very long

lashes. Soon the head and shoulders of a little, little Shrimp were visible, and a small, shrill voice cried something which sounded very like the word "Humbug!" after which the speaker scratched himself down into the sand again very rapidly. Of course no one took any notice of an interruption caused by so insignificant a creature, and the fish wished each other "Good-night!" and swam away to their different homes.

The fisherman heard nothing of what was passing under the water. He went sorrowfully home with his empty basket, but in what manner his wife received him, or whether they got any supper that night, I can't say.

THE CAT-RABBIT.

IN a comfortable basket lined with green baize, not far from the kitchen-fire, lay a large white pussy-cat with two kittens, one white with black spots, and the other yellow. She licked them all over till her rough tongue ached, so that she was obliged to rest it, and as soon as it was rested, she licked them all over again.

The cook bustled about the kitchen, and lifted saucepans on and off the fire without noticing the basket and its occupants much, except to place an occasional saucer of milk within reach of Mother Puss.

By-and-by a little girl came in, carrying something very carefully in her hands.

“What do you want here, Miss Maggie ?” said

the cook. "The kitchen is not the place for young ladies."

"Oh! do let me come in, cookey dear," said the little girl; "I've got something for pussy."

"I always looks after dumb animals, Miss Maggie; the cat don't want nothing at all," answered the cook.

"Oh! this isn't anything for her to eat; it's something for her to take care of. My white rabbit has got such a number of little ones, more than she can possibly take care of properly, and I thought as pussy has only got two kittens, it would be such fun to give her one of them. I'm sure she'll be kind to it."

"You had better take it back to its own mother, miss," said the cook. "The cat has got enough to do to look after them two. She's heavy enough on the bread and milk as it is."

"Do let me try, cookey dear. If she's the least unkind to it, I'll take it away again."

"Well, I suppose you must have your own way, miss," said the cook; "but I don't answer

as the cat don't bite the poor little thing's head off."

The old cat was asleep just then, and Maggie approached the basket softly, put the little rabbit carefully down by her side, and watched the effect anxiously. To her great delight, as soon as she opened her eyes, pussy gave it an affectionate lick all down its back. The little rabbit nearly toppled over, for the touch was much less gentle than what she was accustomed to ; but she evidently only thought her mother was in a hurry, and cuddled up close to her, and Maggie felt satisfied.

"Now, miss," said the cook, "you'd best be off out of my kitchen. I want to get on with the dinner ; and I should say as you'd better take that there rabbit with you, and put it back in the hutch."

"Oh, no," said Maggie, "it's quite happy. Please send the whole basket of pussies up to the nursery by-and-by, and I shall see how they get on."

"It ain't natural like !" soliloquised the cook, as the little girl left the kitchen.

“Very odd that I didn’t notice this one before!” said the old cat to herself. “I certainly thought there were only two! I even counted them on my claws for fear of mistakes. Well, I’m glad one of them favours me so decidedly. This one is certainly smaller than the others for her age, but more active. I should say her eyes will open first.”

That afternoon the basket and its contents were carried up to the nursery to see Miss Maggie. Pussy did not at all approve of her change of quarters. She thought the excitement very bad for her young family, and that it would be best to remove them at once. She seized them by the scruff of their necks, and dragged them towards the door, deafening her maternal ears to their squeals.

“You stupid old Selima,” said Maggie; “you are not like the same cat since you’ve got children. You don’t care a bit for me any more!”

“Selima,” was the name by which pussy went up-stairs. In the kitchen she was never called anything but “the cat.”

By dint of much coaxing on Maggie’s part, pussy

was at last induced to make herself at home on the nursery hearth-rug. Maggie's nurse was laying the tea, and the clatter of tea-things sounded pleasantly in her ear, and suggested comfortable ideas of saucers of bread and milk.

"I never was of an obstinate disposition," she said to herself. "I think I will yield the point gracefully, particularly as the nursery door is shut."

"Aren't they lovely kittens, nurse?" asked Maggie. "I shall call them Fluffy and Buffy. Fluffy will be just like Selima, I think, with one black boot on; and Buffy is a very uncommon colour, isn't he?"

"Yes, miss," answered the nurse, "because, you see, they mostly drowns sandy cats."

"It isn't sandy!" said Maggie, indignantly. "It's the most beautiful golden! But what shall I call the little rabbit? I wonder whether it will grow up most like a cat or a rabbit?"

"I should say as it will always be a rabbit," said nurse, decidedly; "that is, if it lives to be

anything, poor little thing, which seems less than likely. The bread and butter is cut, Miss Maggie. Please to come to your tea."

"I'm coming," said Maggie. "Of course I know that it will always be a rabbit, in one sense, but I should think it will have all the ideas of a cat. Don't you?"

"I don't know nothing about no ideas," answered the nurse. "I don't suppose cats have much ideas except catching mice."

"How can you say so?" said Maggie, angrily. "Selima has ideas about everything."

"Please to come to your tea, Miss Maggie," said the nurse again; and Maggie came slowly.

"It will be a *cat-rabbit*," she said, as she helped herself to bread and butter. "I wish I could think of a good name for it!" But she never could think of a good name for it, and so it was always called the "cat-rabbit."

Every afternoon when Maggie came in from her walk, she asked for the basket to be brought up, and kept it in the nursery while she had her tea

and was dressed to go down to the drawing-room ; and it was her great delight to notice that Selima



treated the cat-rabbit exactly like one of her own children, if anything with even greater tenderness.

Indeed she seemed so much a part of the family, that the cook and the nurse left off saying that Miss Maggie had better take it back to its real mother.

Pussy proved quite right in her idea that the cat-rabbit would open its eyes sooner than the others.

“ Dear little thing,” she said ; “ what an inquiring mind she has ! She takes after me already.” And for a long time she chose to maintain that the cat-rabbit had the most inquiring mind of the three, because she happened to open her eyes first ; but the fact was that she took very little notice of anything.

As the children grew older and stronger, Mother Puss would leave them for awhile in their basket, knowing that they would be well looked after by the nurse or the cook, if not by Miss Maggie herself, and great games the kittens had tumbling over one another in every variety of attitude. The cat-rabbit never joined in the romps, but sat looking on in an indifferent sort of way, sometimes taking no notice at all.

“She is so stupid,” the kittens complained to their mother; “she won’t do anything or understand anything.”

“Sweet child!” the mother would reply; “that’s her retiring disposition. I had just the same when I was her age.”

One day when pussy came into the nursery, there was a regular fight going on in the basket. The cat-rabbit was squeaking — a most unusual occurrence.

“What’s all this about?” said Selima, boxing the kittens’ ears right and left.

“We were only trying to pull the little one’s tail to the right length,” said Buffy; “it looks so very odd!”

“Her tail does well enough,” answered Mother Puss; “only let me catch either of you meddling with it again!” But in her heart she had great misgivings about the little one’s tail, and watched it anxiously, trying to persuade herself that it grew. “I can’t understand it!” she said to herself; “there never was anything of that kind in

our family. However, her ears are magnificent, and will have a most imposing appearance when she learns to hold them upright!"

The kittens were continually finding something to complain of in the poor cat-rabbit. One day it was—

"She has such a shuffling, awkward walk!"

"You mind your own legs," answered the mother.

Another day it was—

"She can't even mew!"

"That's her sweet temper."

"But she can't purr either."

"Her purr will be all the stronger by-and-by for not being exercised early; my own developed very late."

"But I can purr as loud as you now, mother," said Buffy.

"Purr, indeed!" replied Mother Puss, "I'll purr you!"

Another time Fluffy and Buffy came running to her in great excitement.

“Do look at the little one,” they said, “she is actually eating a bit of raw cabbage-leaf which Miss Maggie dropped on the floor.”

“*My claws!*” said the cat, which was the strongest expression she ever allowed herself to use before the children; “put that poisonous stuff down this instant, you naughty child; and that’s for telling tales,” she added, knocking down first one kitten and then the other. In truth, though she always reproved the kittens whenever they made any complaint of the little one, she often felt uncomfortable about her ways in her own mind. For instance, when she gave a most interesting lecture on the legitimate use of claws, and the kittens drank in every word with eagerness, the cat-rabbit evidently did not take in a single word. She never showed the faintest interest in her mother’s tail; and when Miss Maggie dangled a cork for them to play with, she sat by with an air of stolid indifference which was almost alarming.

One day Mother Pussy happened to go into the kitchen, leaving the three children up-stairs. Ponto,

Maggie's dog, was lying stretched out before the fire. He never looked up, or moved an inch so as to let her approach to warm herself ; but as they were barely on speaking terms at the best of times, she did not expect any such little act of courtesy from him.

"Pray," asked Ponto, sneeringly, "is it in your family to eat dry bran?"

"Certainly not," replied Selima with dignity ; "I am at a loss to imagine to what circumstance you can possibly allude."

"Well," replied Ponto, still without looking at her, "it is not a matter of much importance one way or the other, but I happened to be in the nursery just now, and I saw one of your brats burying her nose in a saucer of raw bran ! Ugh ! Miss Maggie needn't have taken the trouble to turn me out of the room, nothing would have induced me to remain there."

Mother Puss felt herself blushing, but she carried it off very well—

"Some childish prank," she said. "Three of them is almost more than one can look after properly."

Ponto actually raised himself up, and looked Mother Pussy straight in the face.

“Really?” he asked, eagerly. “Allow me to simplify the whole matter for you—it wouldn’t take me two minutes; I could spare the time.”

“Fuff!” was all the reply Mother Puss vouchsafed, and she trotted up to the nursery to see what was going on. There, sure enough, was the cat-rabbit intently occupied with a saucer of bran.

“Little one!” she said, more in sorrow than in anger, “I would have lost a whole cockchafer, or half a mouse, sooner than have seen this sight with my own eyes!” The cat-rabbit never even looked up, but went quietly on with her bran.

“Unnatural child! do you wish to break your poor mother’s heart?”

Fortunately just then the bran came to an end, and the cat-rabbit approached Mother Puss with such gentleness of demeanour, that her wrath was appeased for the moment. The cat-rabbit was on

the whole an amiable little beast, and if she had been left quite alone to follow her own tastes, would have got on comfortably enough with her adopted mother, and brother and sister ; but to be constantly expected to do things for which one has neither inclination nor power, and to forego those which nature or one's own wishes prompt, is trying to any temper, and that of the poor little cat-rabbit gradually became soured. Mother Puss grew daily more anxious and unhappy about her smallest darling and her peculiarities.

“I fear,” she made up her mind at last, “that her tail will never be quite like those of other people ; but that is not her fault, but her misfortune, poor dear.” “You might, however, try to hold up your ears a little, my child,” she said one day.

“Shan’t !” said the cat-rabbit, “and that’s flat.”

“I know they’re flat,” answered Mother Puss, “that is just what I complain of. I am sure a little attention and care would enable you to show them to advantage,—they are such splendid ears !”

“I believe you did it on purpose. Leave the hole this moment!”

“Such a lovely mouse!” sobbed the kittens; “and we’ve lost it all through that horrid little one! Oh! oh! oh!”

The cat-rabbit moved away. “I will seek my fortunes elsewhere,” she thought; “I will not stay to be persecuted any longer. Why can’t they let me alone? All I ask is a cabbage-leaf and comfort.”

The nursery-door was open, and she hopped resolutely through it and down-stairs. Ponto was fortunately gone out for a walk, and she went straight through the kitchen without being observed, and out into a yard. There she sat for some time shaking a little, and wondering at her own boldness, and what would come of it. By-and-by Miss Maggie appeared.

“You poor little cat-rabbit,” she said, “are you come to look for your old friends?” and she lifted the little thing up in her arms, and opening the door of a rabbit-hutch which stood near, she put it

gently in. What was the cat-rabbit's astonishment to find there another little person with long ears and a short tail, exactly like herself, in fact ! Maggie put a delightful bunch of green stuff into their hutch, and left them together.

"Mamma," she said, when she returned to the house, "I think I shall leave the poor cat-rabbit in the hutch. I don't think she is happy any longer with the cats. I distinctly saw Selima bite her the other day, and the kittens are so rough to her; and now the poor little thing has run right away."

The excitement of the mouse-hunt over, Mother Puss looked round for the little one; but she wasn't to be seen anywhere. In vain she mewed about. The kittens could hardly conceal their delight.

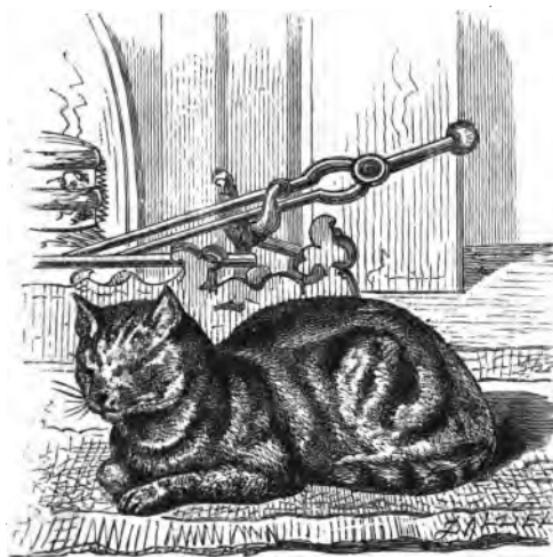
"Now we shall have all the nursery to ourselves," they said, kicking their heels.

Mother Puss did not mew long.

"I dare say it's all for the best," she said. "She never would have grown up to be a credit to me, and doubtless Miss Maggie will provide for her."

The cat-rabbit meanwhile munched away with her new friend, serene and content. They neither of them had much conversation, but that was just the best of it, for uninterrupted munching was what pleased them both. Maggie was the only one who felt dissatisfied and disappointed. "I did so hope the cat-rabbit would turn out partly a cat, mamma," she said; "but she's nothing but a rabbit after all!"

THE CAT SHOW.



presented to her young mistresss.
go?"

"Well," answered Fatima, "I may perhaps

W H A T
do you
think about
this show at
the Crystal
Palace?"
asked Selima
of a beauti-
ful, long-
haired tabby
cat that had
been lately

"Shall you

look in ; but I think it's hardly worth the trouble. What do you say ? ”

“ I don't think I shall attempt it,” said Selima ; “ I have no particular kittens to take just now, my last are getting so large and awkward, and I don't care about the sort of thing myself.”

Selima and Fatima lay by the kitchen-fire, exactly in front of it. A little farther off sat a third cat, a humble neighbour, called Smut. He was an unusually large but rather common-looking black cat, with coarsish fur and a demeanour as if he were apologising for his existence. Selima and Fatima patronised him because he never presumed, and the cook patronised him because he was a better mouser than either of her young mistress's cats, and so he often found his way into their comfortable kitchen.

“ Are you thinking of going, Smutty ? ” asked Fatima ; and then she winked at Selima, as much as to say, “ Isn't that a good joke ? ”

“ Certainly not,” answered Smut, in an agitated manner. “ I should not think of intruding. I

should feel so utterly out of place amongst all those magnificent animals, and exposed to the gaze of the public."

Now this was all very well; but the fact was that the cats themselves had no voice at all in deciding whether they should go to the show or not; it entirely depended upon whether their mistresses chose to send them. However, the idea made them feel dignified and important, and did not hurt any one else.

"Would you like to know what I think of the Cat Show?" said Ponto, who was also in the kitchen. "It's the greatest piece of tomfoolery I every heard of in my life."

Neither of the cats took the least notice of this remark, but they all three began to purr at once, to show how little impression it had made.

"I suppose they'll be having a Rat show next," went on Ponto.

"Cook has made up a very nice fire to-day, hasn't she?" said Selima, in an indifferent manner to Smut.

“It’s glorious!” exclaimed Smut enthusiastically. “I trust I don’t keep any of the warmth from you or the Lady Fatima.”

“Not at all,” answered Fatima graciously; “you see you are quite behind the coal-scuttle.”

“The fire is nothing so very wonderful,” said Selima, who had lived a long time in the family. “You should see the fires we have at Christmas-time, and when the large oven is heated.”

“That *must* be a grand sight!” said Smut.

“Where I come from,” remarked Fatima languidly, “there is no need for this sort of artificial heat, “we have quite a different kind of sun there, it warms one’s fur through and through.”

“Oh! what a delightful place,” sighed Smut.

“I dare say, now,” said Selima, “you don’t have *very* large fires in your cottage, do you, Smut?”

“No, indeed,” said Smut mournfully; “and I am afraid they will be smaller than ever this winter, for I heard my master tell his wife that coals would be so dear they must be very careful.”

“Ah, well!” said Selima pleasantly, “we always have exactly the same fires, no matter what the price of coals may be; so you can turn in here and give yourself a warm whenever you like.”

“That is *very* kind and considerate of you,” said Smut; “but still, if you will pardon me for saying so, to have a little fire in one’s own home that one could depend upon would be a great comfort.”

“One ought not to wish for things that other people have got,” said Selima philosophically; “I have often heard Miss Maggie’s mamma tell her so.”

Poor Smut was quite annihilated, and shrunk away still farther behind the coal-scuttle.

“Mamma!” said Maggie that afternoon, “do you know that the Cat Show at the Crystal Palace is to be quite soon, and that you promised to take me to see it?”

“Yes, dear.”

“And, mamma, I’ve got such a grand idea about it; don’t you think we might send Fatima to the show? She is so beautiful, and her fur is so long.”

"I'm afraid it would be rather a troublesome business, my dear," answered her mother; "but you can ask your papa when he comes home."

Maggie watched anxiously for her father's return in the evening, and, before he had time to get off his great-coat, burst out with—

"Papa, may Fatima go to the Cat Show?"

"Certainly, my dear, if she wishes it; I won't hinder her."

"Now, papa, what I mean is, will you send her?"

"Well, perhaps, I'll see," answered her father.

"Oh! that's quite as good as yes," cried Maggie. "She'll be sure to get a prize, for she's the most beautiful cat in the world. Nurse says they have quite grand prizes. Let me see what shall I do with the money: I'll buy her a splendid collar, and a new saucer for her milk. It wouldn't be fair to spend the money on anything for myself, as it's *her* prize, would it?"

"Well, I don't know about that.

"Perhaps there'd be no harm in getting a wind-

ing-up mouse, that we could both play with ?
What do you think, papa ? ”

“ I think you had better wait till she’s got the prize before you spend the money : you know there will be plenty more Persian cats there, whose mistresses think them quite as beautiful as you think Fatima.”

“ I hope poor dear Selima won’t be jealous,” said Maggie, thoughtfully.

“ Ah, you’d better break it gently to the ‘ pensive ’ one.”

“ You see, papa, of course I love Selima much the best, because I’ve had her so long, and because she *is* Selima, but she isn’t anything so very remarkable to look at, is she ? I mean to strangers— of course to us who know the beauty of her mind, it is different. I’m afraid she might not get a very good prize, and that would be almost worse for her than not going. Still if you think it would be kinder to send her too—— ”

“ Oh ! no,” interrupted her father, “ I think one will be quite enough.”

“If there had been a show last year, just when she had Fluffy and Buffy and the cat-rabbit——”

“The *what*?”

“Oh, papa, you can’t have forgotten the little rabbit that I gave her to bring up, and that she took for one of her own kittens, and who ran away at last.”

“Ah! to be sure, I remember.”

“She’s quite an old rabbit now, and has had such heaps and heaps of young ones, I don’t recollect exactly how many, but I’ve got it written down. I’ll run and look if you would like to know.”

“I’ll try and curb my impatience, and you can tell me another time.”

“Well, then,” continued Maggie, “I was going to say, that if we could have sent Selima, and Fluffy and Buffy, and the cat-rabbit, all to the show at once, that *would* have been grand.”

“It would indeed,” answered her father, “and now I must go and get ready for dinner.”

Maggie flew off at once to tell her nurse, and then

the cook, that Fatima was to go to the Cat Show. Fatima heard the announcement as she lay in her accustomed warm corner, and when Selima came into the kitchen, followed by Smut, she said, in an off-hand manner: "I think, after all, I shall show myself at the Crystal Palace."

"Really?" asked Selima, rather anxiously.

"Yes, it seems that the presence of a Persian cat of my colour and length of fur, will be such a great advantage to the show, that it would be hardly fair to keep away. Also, on Miss Maggie's account, I should really not feel justified in depriving her of a very handsome prize. She has been talking about it all over the house.

Selima sighed very gently; she did feel a pang of jealousy, but it was not at all on her own account: she looked back in imagination at the vistas of kittens she had been blessed with during the last few years, and thought how each and all of the darlings would have been sure to get the first prize had they been sent to a Cat Show in the hey-day of their youth and innocence.

"Oh, Fatima," she said, "I wish you could have seen some of my kittens, one in especial, she was such a wonderful creature ! Her fur was softer and more silky than anything you ever felt ; her ears were like satin, and she had the most gentle insinuating ways, not the least rude or riotous, like many kittens. I adored that child !"

Now Ponto happened to be in a remote corner of the kitchen unperceived by the cats, and while Selima was speaking his sleek black sides fairly shook with laughter. He remembered the child she was describing perfectly, and he also remembered that the quiet ways to which she alluded had been anything but a source of satisfaction to her at the time, and that the poor little creature, who was in fact a young rabbit, had had but a miserable life of it till she had run away and taken refuge with her own kindred. Many months had passed away since that time, and Selima had begun to invest her memory with all sorts of virtues, and was never tired of quoting the perfections of the gentle little thing to her succeeding families.

“She must have been a sweet creature,” said Smut, appreciatively ; “what colour was she ?”

“As white as the driven snow.”

“Ah ! she must have been like you !”

“Well—not altogether.”

“Long fur ?” asked Fatima.

“I should think it would have been very long eventually.”

“Strong purr ?”

“It would have become so, no doubt.”

“What sort of tail—bushy ?”

“Well,” said Selima, a little uneasily,—“her tail was rather—in fact, very—short.”

“Oh !” said Fatima, who was becoming rather bored with the subject—“a sort of Manx cat ! I don’t admire them.”

“She was not a Manx cat,” said Selima, indignantly, “nor in the least like one—her tail would have grown, of course.”

“She never ate bits of raw cabbage-leaves, did she ?—Oh ! no, not at all, nothing of that kind,” said Ponto, suddenly from his corner.

Selima started. "I didn't know that ill-bred dog was in the kitchen," she said.

"What became of the dear little lady?" whispered Smut.

"I had rather not pursue the subject further," answered Selima, "under existing circumstances."

When Smut went home to his cottage that evening he found a very small fire indeed, though it was a cold raw October night. His master, John Smithers, who had been out of work for some time, after opening the door in answer to the familiar mew, sat moodily down by the smouldering embers, with which he had been vainly trying to make the kettle boil against the return of his wife, who had gone out for a day's charing. The little room looked dull and cheerless, with its scanty furniture and the solitary tallow-candle burning, and Smut felt the contrast to the comfortable warm kitchen in Miss Maggie's home keenly; but the sight of Smithers's dejection turned his thoughts to his master's sufferings instead of his own.

He went up to him and rubbed himself affectionately against his corduroy legs, and set up a gentle purr to cheer him. As his master stooped to caress his great black head he thought to himself, "How I wish I could earn some money to help my dear master and mistress, but there's nothing a poor cat like me can do for them except keep the place clear of mice and black-beetles, and that's no trouble, but a pleasure!"

"Well, old Smut, these are hard times, ain't they?" said Smithers, as he scratched him with one finger gently under the chin, "and we want the missus home to set things to rights a bit, don't we?" and Smut purred louder and rubbed himself more vigorously against the corduroy legs, to show his sympathy. When "the missus" came home with her cheery voice and tidy ways, tired out as she was by a hard day's work, she soon made the cottage look more comfortable. She produced a little bundle of sticks out of the cupboard, which set the kettle singing at once; then she snuffed the candle and spread the supper-things

neatly on the table, after which she took two salt herrings, wrapped up in a piece of newspaper, out of her pocket, and began to cook them. "I bought these for a bit of a relish," she said to her husband, "having an eye to the heads and tails for Smut—poor old Smutty, it ain't often he has a treat. What do you think my Lady said when I was up at the hall to-day, father? She said there's to be a regular show of cats at the Crystal Palace, and there are to be prizes in especial for working-men's cats. And, says she, 'Martha, why shouldn't you send your great black cat?' Are you agreeable to the idea, father?"

"To be sure I am," answered her husband, "and I'll venture to say if there's to be a prize for faithfulness, our Smut will get it."

This high commendation, combined with the bright blaze in the grate and the smell of the herrings, would have filled Smut's cup of happiness to overflowing, but for the thought of how his grand friends, Selima and Fatima, would laugh at the idea of his going to the show.

“Now, father, come and eat a bit and cheer up,” said Mrs. Smithers when her preparations were complete.

“Ah!” it’s very well to talk,” answered he, “but all the coals are gone, and I should like to know what we’re to do when that little bit of wood as you’ve been storing up is finished; and victuals so dear, too—it’s like enough to be a hard winter for poor folk.”

“Ah! well,” answered his wife, “we must hope for the best; sometimes sacks of coals come in, in a wonderful way; and as for victuals, now Sally’s in service and doing so well, it isn’t much as you and me and Smut wants.”

“Ah!” thought Smut to himself, “if I were only an elegant-looking sleek cat like Selima, or had long fur like Fatima, I might win a prize at the show for my master and mistress, that would buy coals and food too! Dear, dear, how they will laugh at me in the big kitchen to be sure when they hear I am really going!”

Next day he could hardly summon courage to

present himself to his distinguished friends, and when at last he ventured into the kitchen, he fidgeted about in such an uncomfortable way that Selima noticed it.

“What *is* the matter with you, to-day, Smut? Can’t you sit quietly down?”

“You are sure my coat doesn’t absorb too much heat?” said Smut, nervously.

“Oh! bother!” said Selima, who was rather out of sorts, because she had just heard the cook say that Smut caught more mice than both the other cats put together.

“I beg your pardon,” answered Smut, “but the truth is that I am rather agitated at having heard that I am to go—in fact that I am going to the Cat Show. I know you and the Lady Fatima will think it very presumptuous: I feel it to be so myself, but it is my dear master and mistress’s wish.”

“Ah!” said Fatima, “I thought it was very likely you would go. I hear it is not to be at all an exclusive affair. It is an exhibition for the

People, and although the presence of a few cats of distinction (for whom suitable acknowledgments will be reserved) is desired on account of a small number of aristocratic visitors who will be there, the chief part of the show will consist of honest working cats."

"Dear me!" said Selima, "what a rigmarole!"

"Moreover," went on Fatima, who never lost her temper, "I understand one of the principal objects of the show is to facilitate the sale of poor cats. For instance, Smut, a price (a modest one of course) will probably be put on you, and you may perhaps find yourself transferred to quite a comfortable home. There are many families in which an under-cat is kept to do the mousing, where you would be invaluable."

"Nonsense!" interrupted Selima, indignantly, "no respectable family requires an under-cat. There has never been such a thing in this house, and there never shall be as long as *I* live. I am happy to say I have always been equal to the entire mousing, ay, and the black-beetling too, of this

establishment ; and I have brought up my kittens in the same way. Smut is very welcome to a mouse or two when he likes ; but there is no necessity at all for his services, while I have health and strength."

After which tirade Selima felt a great deal better. Poor Smut, however, had not heard a word of this last speech. Ever since Fatima's mention of the sale of poor cats, his thoughts had been absorbed in the terrible idea that he was going to be sold.

He felt that no comforts or luxuries could compensate him for the loss of his own master and mistress, but at the same time he recognised the fact that it might be an advantage to them to dispose of him. " Supposing I fetched only tenpence," he thought, " it would buy a very large piece of bacon, and there wouldn't be me to keep. To be sure, if I were gone they'd soon be overrun with rats and mice ; but then a neighbour's cat " (here a terrible pang of jealousy went through him) " might come in occasionally and clear the place for them. Oh dear ! oh dear ! what shall I do ? Kind ladies," he

said, turning to Selima and Fatima, who were both pretending to be asleep, "will you excuse me? I don't feel very well."

They each gave a slight nod, and Smut rose and glided out into the garden, where he threw himself upon the grass in a paroxysm of grief. He took no more heed of the autumnal leaves fluttering so invitingly past, than if they had been dull, motionless stones ; he did not even see a fat little toad which crawled deliberately across the gravel walk, just in front of him. How long he lay there he never knew, but it was quite dark when he rose at last and made his way slowly to his own home.

"What's the matter with our Smutty to-night?" said Smithers to his wife later in the evening ; "he hasn't sung a bit since he came in. It makes me feel quite down-like not to hear his voice."

"He ain't well, I'm afraid," answered Mrs. Smithers ; "perhaps he's eat too many black-beetles."

"I only hope he ain't got hold of any poison," said her husband ; "what we should do if any-

thing was to happen to him I don't know. I'm sure he's the life of the house."

Smut's heart bounded at this speech; perhaps after all then they weren't thinking of selling him! He raised himself up a little and began to purr. "Bless him!" said Mrs. Smithers, "ain't it exactly as if he understood every word we said?"

"Mamma!" said Maggie, a few days later, rushing into the room where her father and mother sat, "what *do* you think? Smut's going too!"

"Who is Smut, and where is he or she going?" asked her mother.

"Oh, mamma! you *must* know Smut; he's the black cat that belongs to John Smithers, the man who helps the gardener. He always follows him here when he comes, and sometimes he goes into the kitchen, though he's rather shy. Cook likes him, because he catches the rats and mice Selima and Fatima are too fat and lazy to care about. Well, Smut is to go to the Cat Show, too!"

"Indeed!" said her father. "Happy thought!"

send John Smithers to Sydenham, and let him convey and deliver the two cats himself: that'll save a great deal of bother, won't it, mamma?"

Maggie's father could not escape a little trouble, however: he had to communicate with the directors of the show, who sent a list of regulations for exhibitors, and a little metal number to be tied round the neck of the cat, that there might be no difficulty in identifying her afterwards. 101 was Fatima's number, and Maggie was in great excitement about fastening it on, and deciding what colour of ribbon would set off the grey fur best. Crimson was at last fixed upon, and Fatima was highly delighted with her own appearance when it was arranged. She longed for Selima to see her, but secretly resolved that she would not appear to her to be at all elated. She would act just as if she had always been accustomed to wear new ribbons. When Selima came into the room, however, she pretended not to observe anything about Fatima different from usual, so that poor Fatima was quite disappointed. Maggie perused the regula-

tions with great interest, and read selections aloud to her mother.

“‘The cats will be received at the Centre Entrance.’ Doesn’t that sound grand and important? ‘The cats will be fed and carefully attended to during the exhibition. The directors will make the best possible arrangements for their accommodation during the show.’ Oh! but mamma, listen to this: ‘Any exhibitor in any way interfering with or removing cats from their pens during the exhibition, except in the presence of and with the consent of the superintendent, will be *removed from the building*.’ Fancy! if I interfered with Fatima my being ‘*removed from the building*;’—wouldn’t that be dreadful?”

The day before the show John Smithers was sent off to Sydenham with two baskets, the occupants of which mewed so loud and so ceaselessly as to promise him anything but a pleasant journey. The noise and jolting of the railway train, and the confinement in such a small space, were more than they felt they could be expected to stand with

equanimity, and poor John was almost deafened. At last he ventured to open his own cat's basket a little way and speak soothingly, after which Smut made a great effort to control himself, but Fatima never ceased her complaints till they reached their destination, and confided to her companion that she would never have consented to come if she had known that she was not to travel unfettered, and like a lady. However, the undertaking was accomplished at last, and John Smithers brought word back that he had deposited the two cats safely at the Crystal Palace, but was not allowed to see how they were disposed of. Maggie thought this very hard.

The first day of the exhibition was a Saturday, and Maggie's father was fortunately able to leave his office in London early, and promised to meet her and her mother at Sydenham. It was quite a short journey from where they lived, but it seemed very long to Maggie, so impatient was she to see the cats in general, and her beautiful Fatima in particular.

“This is the happiest day of our lives, isn’t it, mamma?” asked she; but her mother did not respond with the warmth she expected.

“I’m afraid there will be a great crowd,” she said; “I hope we shan’t miss your father, by any chance.”

“Oh; it won’t matter about the crowd!” said Maggie; “of course if we say we belong to one of the cats, the people will let us pass directly.”

Her mother smiled. “There will be nearly three hundred cats, it seems,” she said. “Suppose all their owners were there and expected special consideration—how would that be?”

“I didn’t think of that,” said Maggie.

Happily the meeting with her father was accomplished satisfactorily. The exhibition had been open some little time when they arrived, and the crowd was already great, but he soon made a way for them with his broad shoulders. Maggie’s first feeling was intense disappointment. She had had a vague idea that the cats would be loose about, so that she could go up close to them and stroke

them. Instead of this they were all shut up in cages raised on a stand, and what was worse there was a red rope stretched along a few feet away from them, beyond which no one was allowed to pass, so that she could not even reach the bars with her hands. Her blank look made her father think she was frightened by the crowd. "Hold on tight to the rope, little woman," he said, "and keep close to me," and Maggie's disappointment was soon dispelled by the feast of cats presented to her enchanted eyes. Cats of every variety of colour and size, all perfectly at their ease, as friendly as possible with the public, and as much at home in the great glass Palace as if they had been by their own firesides. Serene mothers, with very young families climbing about them; pairs of kittens at a more advanced age, exactly alike, with darling little faces, cuddling one another; and solitary Toms of such enormous size and weight that Maggie whispered to her mother in an awe-struck tone, "They seem to get larger and LARGER and LARGER!" Then there were cats with fur as

long as goats, wearing placid goat-like expressions of countenance, and curls in their ears; cats with immense bushy tails which they swayed self-consciously to and fro, and cats with no tails at all; white cats without a single black hair, and black cats without a single white hair. Every cage was provided with a raised red cushion, which set off the different coloured furs to perfection (except perhaps that of the sandy cats, who would have looked better on blue or violet) and upon which the occupants stretched themselves ostentatiously, some lying with half-closed eyes in a state of luxurious indolence, and some slightly raising themselves and playing languidly with a piece of string hanging temptingly above them. Contrasting with this contented domestic throng, was one cat, and one alone, to whom the scene seemed strange and bewildering. Loose-limbed, flat-headed, with restless eyes that seemed to look far beyond the inquisitive crowd, a brindled tiger-cat paced uneasily up and down his narrow cage. His nearest neighbour happened to be our friend

Smut, who felt greatly awed and impressed by the stranger's size and beauty, and a little pitiful at sight of his scared mournful expression of countenance. He longed to engage him in conversation, and at last ventured to whisper gently through the bars: "Tiger-pussy!" No answer. "Tiger-pussy! what is the matter? Do you feel cold?" But the tiger-cat took no notice whatever, except by a sad wild stare.

Fatima and Smut had been placed in cages so far apart that they had no opportunity of exchanging ideas with one another after their arrival. Fatima had on one side of her a tortoiseshell mamma, who seemed entirely occupied with four rather unmanageable kittens. She was an anxious-looking matronly cat, and Fatima decided at once that her style of conversation would bore her to extinction, and so directed her remarks to a mouse-coloured young cat on the other side. Miss Mouse-colour had been at the show the year before as a small kitten, so she was naturally *au fait* of all the proceedings, and was able to enlighten

her neighbour upon many points. Fatima found her pleasant enough at first, but by the time the exhibition had opened she had become rather taciturn.

“What do those white cards in front of our cages mean ?” asked Fatima.

“Prizes !” answered Miss Mouse-colour, in a sulky tone, and presently she added, “The show is not to be compared to the one last year : I wish it were all over.” There was no card in front of Miss Mouse-colour’s cage.

“Oh ! I see !” said Fatima, in an indifferent manner, “that very large card in front of my cage caught my eye. I don’t notice one on yours at present.”

“The whole thing is done by interest, I believe,” said Miss Mouse-colour ; “the so-called judges scarcely know a cat from a dog.”

“Oh !” said Fatima, “I had understood they were rather scientific men ; there seem to be a good many mouse-coloured cats rather like you, so perhaps it would have been hardly possible to give prizes to all.”

“It’s rather an effort talking with such a noise going on,” answered Miss Mouse-colour; “if you’ll excuse me, I’ll go to sleep. Don’t suppose for a moment I care in the smallest degree whether I get one of their ridiculous prizes or not,” and she curled herself round and pretended to be asleep.

Maggie and her father and mother were meanwhile making their way slowly through the crowd,—Maggie going into fresh raptures every minute. “Will it be written up about the prizes?” she asked.

“Yes,” answered her father. “See, there are cards, marked 1st and 2nd prizes, on the cages of the cats who have gained them; but don’t make too sure that Fatima will have one—I have been looking through the catalogue, and I don’t see any mention of her.”

“Oh! but, papa! look!” cried Maggie, in another minute, “there she is—there, 101—and she must have got a prize, there’s a big white card fastened to her cage. Why, what’s written on it?—‘Please

to keep moving? What does that mean, papa? What is poor Fatima to keep moving for?"

Her father could not help smiling, though he felt for Maggie's disappointment.

"The request is not addressed to Fatima," he said, "but to the public; it is we who are to keep moving, to give other people a chance of gazing at her charms."

"Then she hasn't got a prize after all!" cried Maggie; "how stupid those gentlemen who gave them must be!" and before her father saw what she was doing she had slipped under the rope and was at Fatima's side,—poor Fatima who had heard all that had passed with infinite disgust and mortification. What, no prize after all! Not even "Highly commended," like her tortoiseshell neighbour with the kittens; could it be possible? Her only comfort now lay in the hope that Miss Mouse-colour had not heard, and would still look upon her as a prize-cat.

After this Maggie enjoyed the most friendly and unrestricted intercourse with the cats, for either

her enthusiasm or the yellow hair streaming from under her hat, carried the day with the official whose high privilege it was to walk up and down within that sacred enclosure and keep other people out, and he let her stay.

All this time Smut was serenely happy in the knowledge which he had gained from the remarks of the passers-by that he was not for sale, and in finding to his amazement that he had won the first prize for "The Best Short-haired Black He-cat belonging to a Working-man," value thirty shillings.

"I can't think," said Maggie, that evening when they had returned home, "why Smut should have got a prize and not Fatima, who is so much more beautiful; it was *very* unfair."

"You see, dear," answered her mother, "Smut is a working-man's cat,—that was the reason."

"Oh!" said Maggie, thoughtfully, "then poor people have some advantages over the rich!"

Now her mother was tired out with the day's exertions, and in fact half asleep when Maggie made

this remark, and the consequence was that it carried her off into a confused train of thought about social inequalities, and she forgot to explain to Maggie how it was that these special prizes had been offered by certain kind ladies, who, being fond of cats themselves, wished to encourage the same taste in their poorer neighbours.

Fatima and Smut remained at the Crystal Palace for two more days of exhibition, and were then sent to their respective homes.

“Well!” said Selima, as Fatima emerged from her basket, “am I to congratulate you? First prize for long-haired tabby, I suppose?”

“Oh, it’s all nonsense about prizes,” said Fatima, and Selima being in the main a kind-hearted cat, changed the subject.

What a welcome Smut had from his master and mistress!

“Why, thirty shillings will buy coals enough to last us all through the winter, and leave something over,” said Mrs. Smithers; and when Smut sat purring at his master’s feet, before a fire of

his own earning, he was indeed a proud and happy cat.

“I’ll tell you what, Selima,” said Maggie, “you are really the best cat of all, and if you happen to have a very nice little family when there’s a Cat Show next year, you shall all go, and if you don’t bring home a prize then, I *shall* be surprised !”



LITTLE STRAWBERRY-BLOSSOM.

IN a damp green spot in the midst of a wood, hidden away from the sunlight by a wilderness of lady-ferns, there grew a little Strawberry-blossom. Its broad leaves spread themselves out luxuriantly enough, but the solitary white flower was stunted and insignificant. The tall ferns and the foxgloves growing round, rarely noticed the poor little pale thing.

“It seems hardly worth while,” the Foxglove would say, “to have so many leaves for such a very

small flower, and takes up a great deal of room ; ” and the lady-ferns quite agreed with her.

When remarks of this kind reached the little Strawberry-blossom’s ear, she felt wounded and sad, for she could not help her own existence.

“ Pardon me, beautiful Foxglove,” she would say, “ I did not plant myself : I dare say I shall soon shrivel up and be out of your way. I wonder why I grew at all,” she thought ; “ it is very dark and lonely, and nobody wants me ! ”

One day a child came and gathered an armful of the fresh green lady-ferns, and then at last a bright sunbeam found its way in, through the break in the fern-forest, and lighted on the head of the tiny flower, making it glisten like a dewdrop or a pearl.

“ I love you, little Strawberry-blossom, I love you,” whispered the Sunbeam ; but the poor little flower had lived so long unsought and unloved that she could not believe it.

“ Not me, kind Sunbeam,” she said, “ not me ; surely it is the Foxglove—the queen of the woods

—that you love, with her splendid crimson bells ; or the lovely wild rose climbing close by ! ”

“ No, little Strawberry-blossom,” answered the Sunbeam ; “ it is you that I love, you are so gentle and retiring ! I had hard work to find you out ; but now I shall come every day and stay with you all day long ! ”

“ Listen to the Sunbeam making love to little Strawberry-blossom ! ” said the Foxglove to a lady-fern ; isn’t it ridiculous ? Her poor little head will be turned ; ” and even the sweet grasses and moss growing close round her laughed mockingly.

But she was too happy to heed them. All the long hot summer day the Sunbeam stayed with her ; and when he said good-night, he promised to return the next morning. In the night a Glow-worm passing by stopped to speak to her.

“ Oh ! Glow-worm,” said she, “ I am so happy ! A Sunbeam has come—a real beautiful sunbeam—and he says he loves me, though I am such a tiny flower. And he’s coming again to-morrow ! ”

“ Hum,” said the Glow-worm, who had seen a

good deal of life. "Don't make too sure of that. The Sunbeam is a great traveller, and travellers are not always to be depended upon ; they go here and there, and forget all about the last place they visited."

"But he said he would come !" said little Strawberry-blossom, "and he is so great and good I think he will keep his word."

"Well," said the Glow-worm, "I don't know much of him ; I am more intimate with his cousins, the Moonbeams. I only wished to speak a word of friendly warning. My advice to you is to go to sleep and forget all about him."

And little Strawberry-blossom went to sleep and dreamed a bright happy dream. But behold ! next morning when she woke, it was even duller and darker than usual ; no Sunbeam was there. In truth, it was raining heavily, and the drops pattered through the fern fronds all round her head. But she did not know it was rain.

"Kind leaves !" she said, "are you weeping for me ?" at which they all laughed.

“No, no, little Strawberry-blossom,” they said, “we don’t waste our tears on such a poor little silly thing as you! Did you really think your fine visitor would come back?”

Little Strawberry-blossom was heart-broken. She could not see beyond her green canopy, and did not know that the sun was even then struggling hard with the clouds. At last he burst forth in all his glory and splendour; the raindrops caught the rays as they passed, and there rose over the wood a wondrous arch of coloured light. Little Strawberry-blossom could not see the rainbow, but she felt a glow of warmth and happiness steal over her, for there was her own Sunbeam creeping in through the dripping ferns.

“Ah! little one,” he said, “did you think I had forgotten you?” and she hung her head with shame at having doubted him.

“You should have more faith, little Strawberry-blossom,” he whispered. “I was only biding my time!”

And through the bright summer days the Sun-

beam came again and again, and in the atmosphere of love and warmth little Strawberry-blossom expanded and developed till she was no longer a pale puny flower, but a beautiful crimson berry shining like a ruby in a setting of emeralds. Even the ferns and the Foxglove could not help admiring her, saying among themselves, "What can have happened to little Strawberry-blossom? She is quite changed!"

"And I will tell you who sent me to you," whispered the Sunbeam. "It was the glorious Sun himself. He is always there, high up in the sky, watching over all—even the tiniest bud, and he sends us into gloomy cheerless dwellings with messages of love for lonely hearts."

THE BULLFINCH'S DÉBUT.

THERE had been a great party at a great house in London. It was all over now; the guests had gone home, the lights were put out, and the flowers which glowed so brightly in every direction but a few hours before, drooped in the deserted drawing-room.

The Countess who had given the party had retired to her chamber, worn out with her exertions, but well satisfied with the conviction that it had been a most brilliant affair, and slept the sleep of one who has well earned her night's repose.

The only daughter of the house, the Lady Gwendoline, had gone to bed also. She too had done her duty, and felt satisfied, but for some reason

or other gentle sleep refused to visit her weary eyelids. In vain she tossed and turned about, she could get no rest. It seemed to her as if the party were going on and on. She could hear the music, and the buzz of voices, and see the elegantly dressed figures moving about in the blaze of light, and the stillness and darkness of her own room brought her no respite.

At last it occurred to her to get up, and fetch a book in which she was much interested, that she had left in her boudoir. It would change the current of her ideas, and perhaps lull her off to sleep, but then it required a good deal of resolution, tired as she was, to go down-stairs to look for it; and it was some time before she could make up her mind to the exertion. At last, however, with a great effort she rose, lighted a candle, robed herself in a flowing white dressing-gown, and crept down-stairs. She had to pass through two big drawing-rooms to reach her boudoir. What a contrast their aspect was now to what it had been so lately! Indeed, it seemed to Lady Gwendoline,

as she crossed the dark space with her solitary light, as if they were almost unaccountably bare and dismantled: she could have declared that half the ornaments had been removed, and even some of the pictures taken down from the walls! What surprised her still more was to see as she approached the boudoir that it was brilliantly lighted, while she distinctly heard a murmur of voices. When she reached the open door she fairly stood still with astonishment, and all thoughts of the book she was come to look for went clean out of her head. The sight which met her eyes was indeed surprising. The boudoir was crowded with books, pictures, and ornaments from the adjoining rooms in addition to its own. Some of them occupied the chairs and the sofa, but the greater part were huddled together on the ground, so close to each other that it seemed scarcely possible to move or to breathe. They were all talking to one another and bowing about as if they had been fine ladies and gentlemen, and making such a clatter as reminded the Lady Gwendoline of something she

had been told during the evening about table-turning.

It was some little time before she could make out what was the cause of this phenomenon, but she presently discovered that the mirror which usually hung over the chimney-piece was giving a party. There could be no doubt that she was mistress of the ceremonies, from the way in which she turned from one to another of her guests, saying something civil to each and having no time to listen to the answer. None of them took the slightest notice of Lady Gwendoline, any more than if she had been a black-beetle instead of a fair lady in white; and she stood watching the proceedings with great interest. Presently something brushed past her through the door-way—a late arrival—and the mirror advanced to meet the newcomer with the greatest *empressement*. It was a newly-framed water-colour sketch of Lady Gwendoline's own doing, a very poor affair, as she knew too well, but the mirror seemed to think a great deal of it. "How good of you to come!" she

said ; " I do hope it won't be too much for you ; pray lean against the wall till I find you a comfortable resting-place."

" How very odd," thought the Lady Gwendoline, " to make such a fuss with that wretched thing ; if it had been the Holbein now." But the Holbein wasn't even in the room as far as she could discover. This set her wondering in what manner the guests had been selected. It was plain the boudoir wouldn't hold more than a certain number, but why was one book invited and not another, one picture and not its neighbour ? Evidently the mirror was no judge of the intrinsic merits of books and pictures, for there was a very stupid album in a place of honour as well as a silly novel, whereas the big brown Shakespeare was nowhere to be seen, and all her books of history and biography had apparently been poked out of the way.

The great personage of the evening seemed to be a large Ormolu Clock. The young lady candlesticks (they were evidently young ladies, their

waists were so thin), became quite agitated when he approached them, and the Mirror addressed herself continually to him.

“So good of you to look in on us,” she repeated at intervals.

“How absurd!” thought the Lady Gwendoline, “that old clock, which hasn’t gone for years!” but gradually she discovered that all the guests were invited and esteemed according to their outsides—the books for their bindings, the pictures for their frames, &c. Everything with gilding about it was admitted, and the more gilding the more it was made of.

By-and-bye there was a movement among the guests to make a little clear space in the middle of the room.

“They’re surely not going to dance!” thought the Lady Gwendoline; “why, they’ll scratch each other to pieces!” Certainly there was hardly room to move, much less to dance; but they managed it somehow.

“I want to introduce you to a young friend of

mine," said the Mirror to the Ormolu Clock. He bowed politely, and, to Lady Gwendoline's amusement, the Mirror brought up, all smiles, her own gold bracelet, which she had taken off and left in the boudoir because the clasp had been broken.

"Solid gold all through?" asked the Clock in a low tone of a Dowager China Bowl sitting near him.

"Very doubtful, I should say," answered she, and her neighbour, the Sèvres Tea-pot, whispered something which sounded like "silver-gilt," upon which the Clock remarked that his dancing days were over.

The Sèvres Tea-pot was surrounded by her six daughters, very choice Tea-cups, bearing a strong family resemblance to one another. Their mother looked anxiously about for partners for them in vain, for the number of dancing ladies far exceeded that of the gentlemen. She threw such a beseeching glance at the Clock as might have melted a heart of stone, but there

is no substance so hard to penetrate as Ormolu, and he remained leaning against the wall close to them during the whole dance in the most unfeeling manner.

The Bracelet had to content herself with a small Indian Cabinet for her partner, and they took their places.

“ You are doubtless full of valuable old coins,” she remarked to the Cabinet.

“ Well, no—not exactly,” answered he.

“ Perhaps rare shells ?”

“ Well, not precisely——”

At this the Lady Gwendoline laughed to herself, for she knew that the Cabinet contained nothing but an old pack of cards and some odd chessmen. Opposite the Bracelet and her partner were an elegant Vase and a gold Inkstand, but their conversation did not interest Lady Gwendoline much. Indeed nothing that the dancers said made the slightest impression on her ; she forgot it the moment it was uttered. She could not make out whether they were dancing the Lancers or a

quadrille; it appeared to her nothing but confusion. The music, too, was very peculiar; she could not tell where it came from, and it seemed a medley of all sorts of tunes.

After the square dance came a round dance, which was still more of a scramble. The China Bowl remarked to the Sèvres Tea-pot (who was still surrounded by her six daughters, the Tea-cups) that it was really a most unpleasing spectacle, so different from the dancing she remembered in her youth, and that she was glad she had no young people belonging to her. The Tea-pot quite agreed with her, and said she would not allow her daughters to dance in such a crowd on any account; they would certainly get chipped, if not broken. Nevertheless, the good ladies seemed to find some pleasure in watching the performance, for they never took their eyes off the dancers, or ceased remarking on them for a moment. How they struggled and panted, and how exhausted they looked! One little Dresden Shepherd and Shepherdess seemed to be really enjoying them-

selves ; they skipped about together smiling and unwearied.

“Just imported, I suppose ?” said the Clock to his hostess, and they both smiled affably.

When the dance was over the floor was strewn with scraps and fragments, and even the Dresden Shepherdess had had a little of the bloom rubbed off her cheeks.

“Poor foolish things ;” thought Lady Gwendoline, “what can be the use of it all ? How much better they would all be in their own niches in the drawing-room if they only knew it ! But perhaps they are not quite in their right minds.”

“We are going to have a little vocal music,” said the Mirror to the Ormolu Clock. “I hope it won’t bore you !”

Lady Gwendoline wondered who the performer could possibly be. The mystery was soon explained. A little crowd was gathering in the corner of the room where the cage hung which contained her Piping Bullfinch. The door was open,

and the Bullfinch advanced rather timidly. Something in her shy manner and her way of standing reminded the Lady Gwendoline of a young singer who had performed at her own party a few hours before. She had great talent, but as yet no name in the musical world, and Lady Gwendoline's mother had kindly allowed her the advantage of being heard in her drawing-room.

No one greeted the Bullfinch, unless a good-natured nod from the Mirror could be called a greeting. She seemed rather to be there on sufferance than as an invited guest. She hesitated a little as she began her song; perhaps she was nervous at having so many eyes fixed on her, but she soon forgot everything but the song she was singing, and a wonderful song it was, now joyous and exultant, and then so tender and plaintive that it brought tears to the eyes of Lady Gwendoline. Never had she listened to singing which so reached her heart, and she had heard the finest music in England, in Germany, and in Italy.

“I had no idea my Bullfinch could sing like

that," she thought, and indeed it seemed as if the little bird were inspired; her throat swelled and swelled, and the clear sweet notes penetrated to every corner of the room. And yet no one except those just standing round her attended. Lady Gwendoline could hear the Clock talking to the Mirror all through, and there were many half-whispered remarks, among which she could even distinguish some words of criticism. This made her very angry.

"Why you could none of you sing a note to save your lives!" she thought.

When the song was over, the Ormolu Clock moved his pendulum once gently to and fro, and the Inkstand lifted one leg, and let it fall again very softly, by way of applause.

"Thanks *so* much," said the Mirror, and the Bullfinch retired. From that moment both the Mirror and her guests seemed to forget her very existence.

After all it was no wonder they could not enter into the Bullfinch's song, which told of hopes and

fears and realities of life all unknown to her gorgeous listeners. For the Bullfinch was a warm living thing, with a heart beating in her bosom, and they were only cold, hard ornaments, or pieces of mechanism, painted and gilt. Lady Gwendoline, however, did not make allowance for this ; she felt hurt and indignant, and was thinking of haranguing the whole assembly on the subject, when there was a general move towards the opposite door. The guests were evidently going into supper. As she watched them disappear in pairs a sudden draught put out not only all the lights in the boudoir, but her own bed-candle. How she got back to her own room she never could remember, but she woke next morning very late and very tired.

At breakfast she was unusually silent.

“ You are quite knocked up, my child, I am afraid,” said her lady mother.

“ I am glad we are going into the country so soon,” answered Lady Gwendoline. “ I am tired of London parties and all that kind of thing.”

She said nothing about what she had seen in the night, but after breakfast she visited the boudoir. It looked much as usual, and Bully seemed quite common-place over her seed and water, but Lady Gwendoline looked at her always afterwards with a sort of respect.

THE CHRISTMAS PARTY.

IT was Christmas-time, and the old hall at the Manor House was decorated with evergreens. They were carried in from the garden, and the children of the house made them into beautiful wreaths and arches, till the hall looked like a green bower. A little Fir-tree, growing in the shrubbery, watched her neighbours being carried away to the house, and sighed.

“I should like to be chosen too,” she thought, “and planted in the hall and admired. But there is no hope of this, I am too stiff!”

At last, however, the gardener and the gardener’s boy came to her, and dug her up, with a good deal of earth round her roots, planted her in a green tub, and carried her also into the house.

“It is too good to be true,” she thought; but she did not meet with such a pleasant reception from the inmates of the hall as she expected.

“Dear me!” said the Ivy-wreath, twining round a pillar, “how much room you take up! I always cling as close as ever I can to avoid incommoding my neighbours.”

“Have you no berries?” asked the Holly over the picture.

“Why don’t you hang,” said the bunch of Mistletoe in the centre of the hall, “instead of standing up so straight? It is considered more graceful.”

“Pray are you for use or ornament?” asked the old Clock.

“You had better not come too close,” said the Fire in the chimney, “for fear of accidents.”

The Fir-tree felt disappointed. “It was better in one’s own house in the shrubbery,” she thought. “There at least one was in nobody’s way. I am not fitted to shine in society. No one will ever admire me!”

By-and-by, however, she got plenty of attention. The ladies of the house came round her, pronounced her perfection, and loaded her with gifts. The Fir-tree hardly recognised herself, hung all over with beautiful little toys, and sugar-plum bags. On the top of all stood a little fairy, on one toe, with glittering wings, and skirts covered with silver spangles.

“This is, indeed a precious gift!” thought the Fir-tree; but, still, she was not as happy as she expected to be. Her companions in the hall were shorter in their manner than before.

“Dear me! How smart we are all of a sudden!” said the Holly.

“I am sorry I can’t stop to pay compliments,” said the Clock; “but the household depends on me.”

“The tree last year was even finer,” said the Picture over the chimney-piece.

Late in the evening came the supreme moment. The tapers were set alight, the Christmas-tree blazed forth in all her splendour, and a hundred

little eyes gazed upon her with wonder and admiration.



Now, surely, the Fir-tree ought to have been satisfied ; but no, the jealousy of her companions

in the hall grieved her ; besides, she felt almost overwhelmed with her own magnificence, and there was an awful sense of responsibility in supporting the weight of that wonderful little fairy.

When the tapers burnt low the lady of the house produced a bag, from which the children drew numbers, and then the pretty things off the tree were distributed among them according to what they had drawn. It was all chance-work, some of them got handsome toys, and some little besides sugar-plums. A little girl, called Effie, drew the beautiful fairy ; and one very little girl was inconsolable, because the fairy did not fall to her share. She cried, and would not be comforted with a negro-faced Jack-in-the-box. Effie hugged her treasure close.

“ You will soon be too big for dolls, dear,” said her mother ; suppose you give it to the poor little girl who is crying so.”

“ But it’s my own,” said Effie.

“ Do as you like, my child,” said her mother.

Effie said nothing ; but presently she went up

to the other little girl, and put the precious fairy into her arms.

“ You may have it,” she said.

“ For my own, to keep ? ”

“ For your very own,” said Effie.

The little girl dried her tears, and jumped for joy; and long afterwards, when the paint was rubbed off the fairy’s cheeks, and her silver spangles were tarnished, and one of her legs was broken, Effie liked to remember the pleasure she had given.

The Fir-tree was so occupied in watching the looks of delight all round her, that she hardly noticed that she was gradually returning to her old sombre self, with no ornament but her own dark green feathers; but as her tapers burnt so low that the hot wax scorched her, she began to realise it.

“ I wonder why I don’t feel sad,” she thought, “ at losing all my beautiful possessions. On the contrary, I have never felt so light-hearted before. How pleased all the dear little chil-

dren look ! This will be something for me to think of when I go back to my shrubbery ; for I suppose they won't care to keep me much longer."

Gradually the merry faces disappeared, and the children went home to bed. The Fir-tree, so lately the object of attraction to all, was left alone in the darkened hall, and forgotten. Her companions began to patronize her.

" You look much better without all that finery," said the Mistletoe.

" Watch us carefully," said the Ivy, " and I should not wonder if you picked up a few ideas of grace."

" You really would not make bad firewood when you are a little more withered," said the Fire, which was burning very low in the grate.

" It's time to strike twelve ; I wish you a very good night," said the Clock politely.

The Fir-tree felt grateful for the kind words, and next day, when she was carried back to her shrubbery and replanted in the old spot, she was

quite content to be left to her life of obscurity. No one was envious of her, and she had a great joy at her heart—the joy of having made others happy.

THE END.

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